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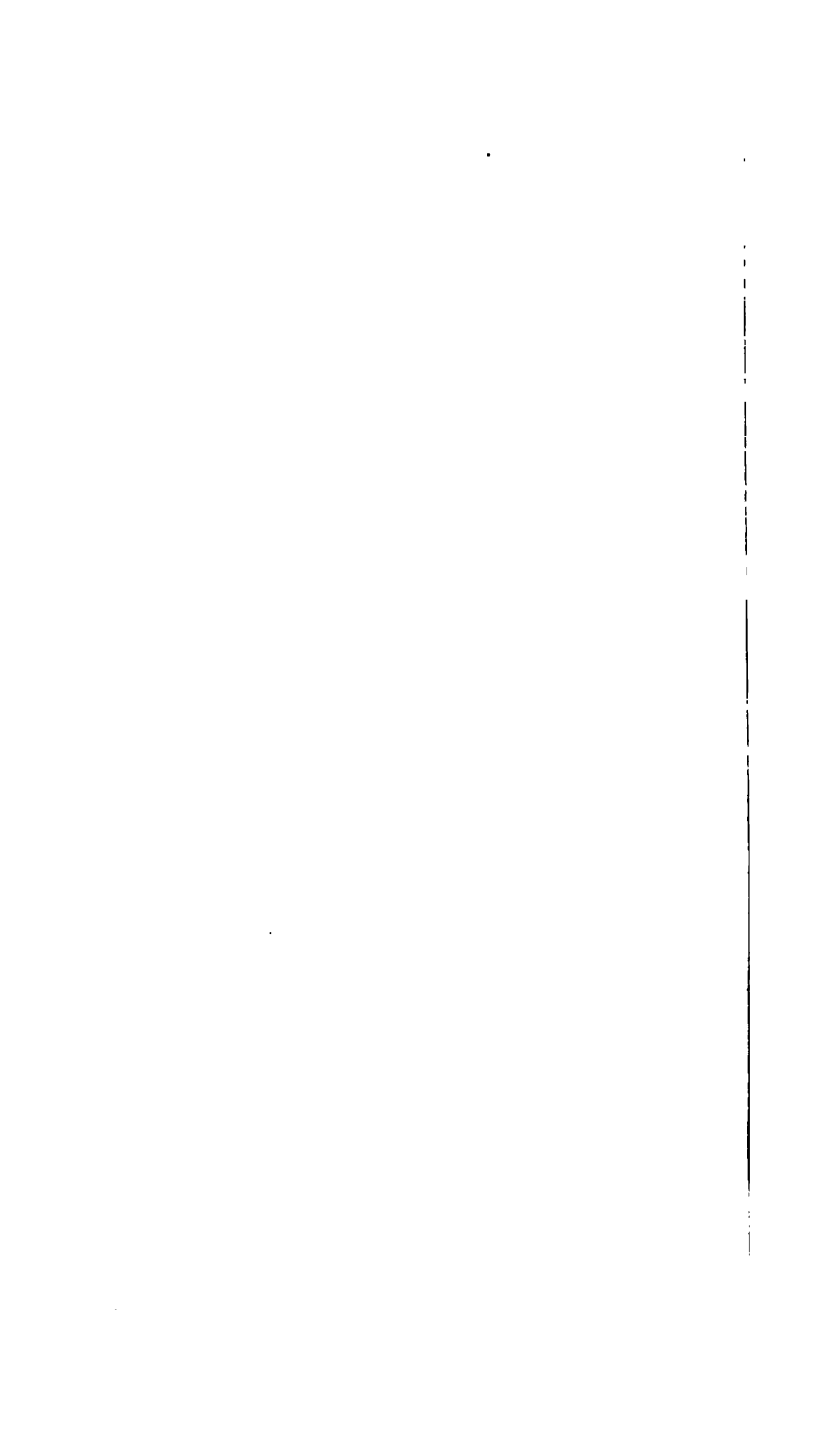


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# MEDITATIONS

ON THE

## HISTORY OF HEZEKIAH.

BY AUGUSTE LOUIS ROCHAT,

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AT ROLLE.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY THE

REV. WILLIAM HARE, A B.

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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

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THE Lord seems to have blessed a former series of Meditations which I published. I have received requests from different quarters to print another. For a long time, I was prevented by the physical impossibility of writing much, but the Lord has lately removed that obstacle by sending me a brother who had taken down copious notes of some of my pastoral addresses, from which I have drawn up the Meditations contained in this volume, dictating them to another person who has had the kindness to lend me his friendly hand. Thus the cloud having been taken up (Num. ix. 21), I thought it my duty to obey the command of the Lord, and to proceed.



It is well, perhaps, for the reader to bear in mind that these Meditations have been preached, that he may not be surprised at some familiar expressions, or detailed applications, which naturally occurred in addressing a small congregation, of which I am the stated minister, and with which I am intimately connected.

Many will, perhaps, think that I have spoken too largely of certain inward conflicts through which all believers are not called to pass; that I have been too often occupied in consoling and raising up the weak. They will think that I ought rather to have treated of the joys and privileges of the Christian, and of the happiness of close communion with Christ. To this I shall answer, first, That I have been guided by my subject; 2dly, That what does not suit some minds may suit others, that we are commanded to “comfort the feeble-minded” (1 Thess. v. 14), and that he who is strong and rejoicing, ought to be glad that a helping hand is stretched out to his weak or sorrowful brother; and who knows whether he will not himself be happy, one day, to

find at hand the word of consolation which he needs not now? "Let not him that girdeth on his armour boast himself as he that putteth it off." Lastly, in treating largely of the inward conflicts of souls vehemently assaulted by the adversary, and which require to be preserved from despondency, I have been really *myself*; for I have spoken of what I have seen with my eyes and what my hands have handled. Now I think that every one, in order to be sincere, and to have the blessing of God upon his labours, ought to continue *himself*, and that the preaching of every minister to be natural, ought to be characterized by the tinge of his own hidden life. Let those who habitually walk along an easy path by the side of still waters, describe in their preaching the Christian's joys and triumphs: they do well; that is the gift bestowed upon them; let them praise the Lord for it, and keep themselves humble. As for me, since I know the spiritual life more in its conflicts than in its enjoyments, and may call myself with Jeremiah, in a certain sense, "a man of contentions," I should have been guilty of deception had I

sought to give a different shade to my meditations. The ways through which it has pleased the Lord, always wise, and just, and good, to cause me to pass, have fitted me to unfold to others the deceitfulness of the heart and the devices of Satan, and also to point out to weak souls some of the lowest branches of the Tree of Life, which graciously hang down near the ground to meet the hand of those who are at the lowest grade of spirituality. This is the gift allotted to me; I must not turn aside from it for fear of boasting in that which is beyond my measure.

May the Lord, who distributes to each his gifts according to his own will, be pleased to bless those meditations with that blessing which is suitable to them. If by his grace they comfort any of those precious souls which are under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, or enlighten them respecting their own hearts, let all the glory be given to Him whose blessing alone it is that maketh rich! I shall make of those who may receive any good by their means, the same request that I made in the preface of my former

work, namely, to render me again this good by praying for me and for my family. If any one of those to whom I then made this request, and who has been induced to comply with it, should happen to read what I now write, let him know for his encouragement, that his prayers have not been in vain : that in my bodily and spiritual weakness I have been wonderfully supported from moment to moment, and that the grace of God has not left itself without witness among my family. The Lord, who gives and who takes away, has deemed it fit to take to himself one of my dear children, in his eighth year. But, glory be to his name, he has been pleased to let me see in this dear child, before he took him, marks of faith which have given me great consolation. Though my heart still bleeds when I think of the last painful conflict in which dust returned to dust, I can rejoice in the comfortable thought, that that happy soul, "washed, justified, sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God," has early left the misery of this mortal life, and rests in peace until the day when

our "dead men shall live, and the earth shall cast out the dead." Glory to God through Jesus Christ. Peace through the Holy Ghost, be with every one who reads these lines.

A. ROCHAT.

## ADVERTISEMENT.

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**THE** Author of these Meditations is well aware that as no one in the present day can call himself inspired in the sense in which those were who wrote the Word of God, so no one who now undertakes to expound any part of the Sacred Volume, ought to presume to think that what he has written is altogether free from error, or wish to be taken as an infallible guide. He therefore begs the reader of these Meditations to compare them with the Scriptures to see that all their contents are conformable thereto. Although he is sure he has not erred with respect to those doctrines which are the foundation of Salvation, he believes that he may have mistaken the mind of the Spirit in some particular passages, and he would deeply regret that his authority should lead others into error. He therefore begs of each reader to examine the Word of God for himself upon each point, and he requests of

those who shall be able, by a true and sound interpretation of the Scripture, to shew that he has been misled, to have the kindness to do so ; and if the error should be sufficiently important to require it, he will be ready to retract it in any suitable method which may be pointed out to him.

When we have any knowledge of the weakness and imperfection of that measure of the Holy Spirit which we have received from above, and of the degree of light which the Lord may reserve for the "latter days;" when we know how the slothfulness or feebleness of man leads him to rest upon the authority of another, rather than seek an opinion for himself by an examination of the Scriptures ; we feel, when we give, by means of the press, a fixed character to our present convictions of divine truth, the need of accompanying the publication of our thoughts with a notice such as this, lest we should be a snare to others, in such important concerns. May God enlighten each reader, and destroy the bad effect of all that may not be conformable to his Word.



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# MEDITATIONS

## ON THE

### HISTORY OF HEZEKIAH.

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#### MEDITATION I.

##### THE NATURE AND EFFECTS OF HEZEKIAH'S TRUST.

"Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahas king of Judah began to reign. Twenty and five years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Abi, the daughter of Zachariah. And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did. He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Ne-hushtan. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. For he clave to the Lord and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses. And the Lord was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth: and he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not." 2 KINGS, xviii. 1—7.

HEZEKIAH, whose history we are about to consider, was the son of Ahaz, king of Judah and Benjamin, the two tribes which continued faithful to the house of David. Ahaz reigned sixteen years, and was one of the most wicked of the kings of Judah, so that his name became a proverb to denote an incorrigibly bad

man ; doubtless in allusion to what is said of him in the second book of Chronicles, where we read, that “ in the time of his distress he did trespass yet more and more ; this is that king Ahaz.” 2 Chron. xxviii. 22. He introduced idolatry into his kingdom, and “ burnt his children in the fire after the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel.” 2 Chron. xxviii. 2—4 ; and having been defeated by the Syrians, he sacrificed to their gods, saying, “ Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them that they may help me.” 2 Chron. xxviii. 23.

Such was the king whom Hezekiah his son succeeded, a pious prince, whose character formed a striking contrast to that of his father.

There are two lessons which we learn from this circumstance ; first, it teaches us that faith or unbelief do not entirely depend on the influence of education or of the examples which we receive in our paternal home, and that we do not inherit them like the possessions and blood of our parents. The Scripture tells us, that those who believe are “ born, not of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God.” John i. 13.—David, the man after God’s own heart, had many ungodly children, and Ahaz, the idolatrous Ahaz, was the father of the pious Hezekiah, to teach us, that “ it is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy,” (Rom. ix. 16,) that it is God that maketh one man to differ from another, even among the children of the same family, saying, “ Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated.” Rom. ix. 13. If any be disposed to raise difficulties to this, the answer which we give to all is to say with the Scriptures, that “ God hath mercy on whom he will,” Rom. ix. 18 ; that this is not a question of *debt*,

but of *grace*. Again, our answer is, to say with the word of God, that we are all deserving of condemnation and wrath. Ephes. ii. 3. And that if, on the one hand, God "sheweth mercy to whom he will," on the other, "he hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that he should return from his ways and live." Ezek. xxviii. 23. It is, perhaps, difficult, and even impossible, for man to reconcile these apparently conflicting statements: on the one hand, that there is an *election*, a choosing on the part of God; and on the other, that "he willeth not the death of a sinner." It is for God to reconcile them, and for us to receive them, without disputing; "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"

The pious Hezekiah succeeding, as he did, such an impious father, teaches us a second lesson. We learn from it that there is no situation, however unfavorable, in which the grace of God cannot reach a sinner: therefore we should never despair of the conversion of any individual. Doubtless, circumstances favorable to piety, are a blessing; but it is not these circumstances which effect conversion; on the other hand, unfavorable circumstances are a misfortune; yet they do not prevent the grace of God from acting. Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, was brought up in the midst of a complete system of idolatry; from whence, then, did he receive his piety? From that God who gives it to whom he sees fit to give it. Let us then supplicate that good and powerful God to bestow the same grace on those multitudes who are so circumstanced, that we know not how they could attain to faith, unless it were the gift of Him who is able to bless his own word, even where there is every thing that seems calculated to render it ineffectual.

The Scripture delineates the character of Hezekiah in a few words, when it tells us, that "he trusted in

the Lord God of Israel." This prevailing feature in Hezekiah's character is that which has particularly struck us in reading the history of his reign, and has in a great measure engaged us to make that portion of Scripture the subject of our meditations. It is a feature which ought to predominate in the character of every Christian, and to which it is necessary frequently to direct the attention of those who desire really to be found in Christ, at that great day when they only that "have the Son shall have life." Observe, in support of what we advance, that this is a feature by which the people of God are frequently characterized in Scripture. One of the prophets, in speaking of that spiritual people who were to succeed Israel after the flesh, thus describes them: "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord." Zep. iii. 12. When the apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Ephesians, describes the elect, he represents them as those who "have trusted in Christ." Eph. i. 12. In like manner, in the epistle to the Hebrews, speaking of Christ, he says: "Whose house are ye, if ye hold fast your confidence and rejoicing in hope firm unto the end." iii. 6. Such, then, is the general feature which distinguishes the children of God: "they trust in the Lord," and put no confidence in themselves. "We are the true circumcision," says St. Paul, writing to the Philippians, "who worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh." iii. 3.

In examining, with reference to his trust in God, that part of Hezekiah's life which is related in the present and following chapters, we shall consider—First, the *nature* of his trust, and, in general, of a Scriptural trust; Secondly, the *effects* of that trust; Thirdly, the *success* of it; and, lastly, the *trials* to which it was exposed.

## THE NATURE OF HEZEKIAH'S TRUST.

First, we say the *nature* of Hezekiah's trust : "He trusted in the Lord God of Israel." Remark the expression : "the Lord God of Israel." Why did he trust in the Lord? Because he was the God of his fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and of Jacob. He trusted in the Lord on account of the promises which he had made to them and to their posterity. In like manner, that which distinguishes a Christian's trust from every other, is, that it is founded on the promises of God in Christ Jesus. We are told that the "Lord Jesus Christ is our hope," 1 Tim. i. 1; that "Christ in us is the hope of glory," Col. i. 27; that "the promise of eternal life is in Christ Jesus," 2 Tim. i. 1; and St. Paul declares, that out of Christ there is no hope that deserves the name; he says of those that are without Christ, that they are "without God and without hope in the world." Eph. ii. 12.

As, however, man would be miserable unless he had some dawn of hope, the unregenerate who believe not in the promises of God's word, create a kind of hope for themselves and say, "surely we must trust in God; what would become of us if we did not put our confidence in him?"

But the unregenerate, whose hope is not based upon the promises, have but a vague and uncertain hope : a hope that may lull them into a carnal security, but cannot give them true peace. Therefore our Lord, after saying to his disciples :—"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you," adds, "not as the world giveth give I unto you ; let not your heart be troubled neither let it be afraid,"—which teaches us that the peace of the world leaves the heart troubled and full of fear. And what peace can there be when the judge



has not said peace, nor pronounced the criminal acquitted. Let the world shew us its votaries who can die in peace, and say, that death has lost its sting. But we can confidently invite them to come and behold the dying believer, who, resting on the promises of mercy in Christ, departs with the language of Simeon, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." Luke iii. 23.

Compare but the countenances of two individuals, one of whom places his trust in Christ, while the other rests in his own works, or in an undefined hope of mercy, and judge of the difference. In the humble but peaceful countenance of the former you shall read the fulfilment of that promise, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is." Jer. xvii. 7. While through the false security of the other, you shall read in his anxious look the execution of that sentence: "Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm. Jer. xvii. 5.

But Hezekiah put not merely a part of his trust, but his whole trust, in the Lord. "He clave to the Lord, and departed not from following him." We have here another characteristic of genuine trust; it should rest entirely upon the Lord, and neither depart from him, nor depend on any other object. The Christian should fix his eyes continually on Jesus, without ever turning them away, to look for consolation. In this respect, my brethren, our trust is too often defective. We trust in the Lord, indeed, but we do not count purely and simply upon his promises; we would also trust in ourselves, resting on our feelings, the degree of joy we experience, our strength, or our good resolutions. Hence it is that our trust being mixed, no longer affords us a solid support. As it resembles the image of Nebuchadnezzar, the feet of which were

"part of iron and part of clay," it is never firm, or at least it is often shaken. Never shall we know what a full confidence is, until we have altogether ceased to trust in ourselves, and learned to rest with our whole heart upon the Lord.

But perhaps you will say, I have neither joy, nor love, nor zeal for the glory of God; I feel my heart as hard as a stone; how then will you have me trust? Such a case is grievous, indeed: but, notwithstanding, there is a remedy, if you really mourn over it. "Hope against hope," as Abraham did; and give glory to God, by believing that he who made the promises is faithful, and is able to accomplish them. There are in Christ Jesus exceeding great and precious promises, whereby we have "all things that pertain to life and godliness." 2 Pet. 1. 3, 4. If the Lord tarry, learn to wait for him; and soon shall you be able to say with David, "I waited patiently for the Lord; he brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings." Psalm xl. 2. Know that your joy, your zeal, your love, must be the fruits of a believing dependance upon God, but are not the cause and foundation of it. If, hitherto, you have been deprived of these fruits of faith, does it not arise from your faith having never been strong, and from your having sought the fruits before you had the faith from which they grow? Besides, what will become of you, if you trust not as you are? You have not joy, you say; will you obtain it by giving up hope? You have not love; will you secure it by ceasing to regard God as a father, and to believe that he loves you? "We love him, because he first loved us." Your heart is hard; will it be softened if you shut it up against hope, and keep at a distance from Christ in fear and sadness? When you find in yourself neither joy, nor

love, nor brokenness of heart, when you find there but one thing only,—a looking to Christ as the only resource of a sinner ; what will become of you, if, looking to him, you cannot “hope against hope,” and say, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” Will you find any other door by which to escape from the circle of difficulties, in which you are, as it were, enclosed, but that one which is called in Scripture, “the door of faith?” Is there any other way of deliverance than that of coming to Christ, just as you are? Far from Him, where will you obtain what you want? Yes, where will you obtain it? When you find yourself miserable and worthless, will you extract out of your misery and worthlessness, something on which you may place your dependance? You will not go to Christ, just as you are! Then give yourself up to despair; for Jesus hath declared, that “without him you can do nothing.” And, in fact, were you to live for ages keeping at a distance from Christ, at the end of those ages you would find yourself just at the point where you are this day. Renounce hope, then, for ever, or learn from this day to hope in a simple faith in the promises which God has made to every sinner who can say with Peter, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.” John vi. 68.

It is to lead his children to trust solely in himself, that the Lord sometimes makes them pass through a painful state of mind, wherein he deprives them of the sensible effects of faith on which they were too much inclined to depend. You will find an explanation of the weakness, dejection, misery and worthlessness which you feel at such moments, in the account which the apostle gives of God’s dealings with himself:—“We were pressed out of measure, above strength, inso-much that we despaired even of life: but, we had the

sentence of death in ourselves," adds he, "that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead." Here is the mystery unravelled. You must not *trust in yourself*; all confidence in your own strength, all self-righteousness must fall before the cross, like Dagon before the ark. Doubtless, you are still full of self; you are still seeking self under the garb of humility, and amid these general lamentations over your miseries, which, instead of directing your eyes to the Saviour, are perhaps turning them away from him. To withdraw you from such a delusion, the Lord removes all your unstable props, and reduces you to a state of mind, in which, from the failure of all other consolations, you are obliged to walk simply by faith, and to hope, resting exclusively on the promises.

And imagine not that when you thus trust in God, even in the most desponding state, you are less acceptable to him than if you were full of joy and love. Doubtless, a heart full of love and joy is an inestimable blessing, when at the same time we rest our hope of salvation and our confidence on the merits of Christ alone. Nevertheless, I know not if there be anything more honoring to God, than the state of the man who, feeling the depth of his misery, seeing in himself nothing on which to rest, finding in himself nothing but emptiness, weakness for every thing good, and opposition to the will of God, takes courage in looking to the promise of God, and gives him glory, saying, "God cannot lie; hath he said, and shall he not do it; hath he spoken, and shall he not bring it to pass?"

If I open the word of God, and demand who are the persons whose faith it extols, I find that they are those who believed against all appearances, and in opposition to all discouragements. I see there an Abraham commended, because that, "being not weak

in faith, he staggered not at the promises of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." Rom. iv. 19, 20. I see that same Abraham commended for his "faith whereby he offered up Isaac: of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead."

I open the Bible again, and I find a commendation of the faith of Noah, who, upon the intimation which the Lord gave him, and contrary to all human appearances, believed in the universal deluge, built an ark for the saving of his house, and for the space of a hundred and twenty years condemned the world by that silent preaching, continuing to give credit to the threatenings of God, notwithstanding the apparent delay of their execution. In the epistle to the Hebrews, I find the apostle Paul commending all those who "died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Heb. xi. 13. I hear the Lord Jesus Christ commending the faith of the woman of Canaan, who persevered in following him, notwithstanding the apparent coldness with which he answered her entreaties at first. "O woman," said he, "great is thy faith." I hear the faith of the centurion called *great*, because he declared that he needed not the presence of Christ in his house, to make him believe that he could heal his servant, but that he was persuaded that the Lord had only "to speak the word, and his servant should be made whole." On the other hand, I find not Jesus praising the faith of Thomas, who required to see and feel before he believed. "Thomas," said he to him, "because thou hast seen, thou hast believed; blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed."

We learn likewise, from the history of the Israelites, that those who will only believe what they see, and feel, and touch, neither believe nor rejoice for any length of time ; that they soon dishonor God by their despondency, and bring upon themselves his rebukes and displeasure. When Israel saw the great power which the Lord had displayed against the Egyptians, "when the waters covered their enemies, and there was none of them left, then they believed his word, and sung praises ;" but the Spirit adds, "they soon forgot his works, and waited not for his counsel." Ex. xiv. 39, 81. Ps. cvi. 11, 13. As soon as some new difficulty presented itself to them in the wilderness, their faith wavered, "they turned their back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel. They remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy." Ps. lxxxiii. Hence, far from commending their faith, the Spirit of God, speaking of them, says : "Therefore the Lord heard this, and was wroth : so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel, because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation." Ps. lxxviii. 21, 22. Let us then learn from this unbelieving and rebellious people, not to tempt God on every occasion, saying, "Is the Lord among us, or not?" Let us cleave unto the Lord with a steadfast heart, knowing in whom we have believed. Let us reject as injurious to his faithfulness, all the discouraging thoughts that arise in our minds, when the Lord, to prove us, makes us encamp, like Israel, in dry places ; let us go on, notwithstanding the drought and barrenness of the wilderness, persuaded that he who hath called us is faithful, and will not suffer us to perish by the way. Like Hezekiah, let us trust in the Lord, let us cleave to him, and not turn away from him.

The last feature in Hezekiah's trust is, that it was associated with uprightness. "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did. For he clave to the Lord, and departed not from him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses." 2 Kings, xvii. 5, 6. It is also said of him, in the book of Chronicles, that "he wrought that which was good, and right, and truth, before the Lord his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered." 2 Chron. xxxi. 20, 21. Had he not been thus upright in heart, he could not have trusted in the Lord God of Israel; for conscience, in accordance with the word, tells us, that, while "with the upright, the Lord sheweth himself upright, with the froward he will also shew himself froward." 2 Sam. xxii. 26, 27. Where there is not uprightness, and where the heart condemns us, there can be no solid confidence. In the reign of the impious Ahaz, when the Lord sent against him and his idolatrous people the kings of Syria and of Israel, it is said, that "the heart of Ahaz was moved, and the heart of the people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind." Isa. vii. 2. And how could they be calm, and trust in the Lord, seeing they had forsaken him, and their heart testified that they had provoked him with the works of their hands? On the other hand, where there is uprightness, there will also be confidence. When danger approaches, the upright man can say with David: "My defence is of God who saveth the upright in heart. What time I am afraid I will trust in thee. When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know, for God is with me." Ps. vii. 10; lvi. 3, 9.



But, you will perhaps inquire, wherein uprightness consists. I answer with the Word, that uprightness, or what is the same thing, *a good conscience*, consists in *a desire to live honestly in all things*. To be upright does not necessarily imply to be very advanced in faith, piety, and love. A man is upright in heart when he wishes not to retain with him a single sin; when he fights against all with some degree of sincerity; when he prays to God to be enabled to fight against them more sincerely. A man is upright, when he can say with sincerity, I ought to give myself entirely to God; it is true, that of myself I cannot do this; but, I feel that I ought to do it, and I will beseech God to give me the power. I have no secret reserves, or, if I discover any, I spread them before the Lord, and entreat him to take them away. I present myself before Him, as I am, with all my misery, and with a sincere desire, or at least petitioning for a sincere desire, to be healed of every sin, and enabled to serve him with a perfect heart.

I have said that uprightness is inseparable from trust in the Lord. The word of God every where declares this. Job, speaking of the hypocrite, says, "The hypocrite's hope shall perish; whose hope shall be cut off, and whose trust shall be a spider's web. He shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand; he shall hold it fast, but it shall not endure." Job, viii. 13, 15. Isaiah says, "Fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites," Is. xxxiii. 14; and in another place, "They have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein, shall not know peace." Is. lix. 8. To the exhortation, "Trust in the Lord," David adds the exhortation, "Do good," thus connecting confidence in God with uprightness. In the 119th Psalm, he shews us that it was only in the way of uprightness that he trusted in

God, when he says: "Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments." ver. 166. The Apostle Paul, also, unites these two things, when he says: "Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith." In a word, the Scripture identifies in the same promise the man who trusts in the Lord, and the man who is upright of heart. "He that trusts in the Lord," it tells us, "mercy shall compass him about. Be glad and rejoice ye righteous; and shout for joy all ye that are upright of heart." Ps. xxvii. 10, 11.

And how, in fact, could there be any trust in the Lord without uprightness! The Spirit of God, which is a Spirit of truth, cannot bear witness to a heart that is not upright. Besides, Christ, who is in us the hope of glory, can never enter a heart without purifying it: God, it is said, purifies the heart by faith. So long then as a heart is without a desire to be purified, it is evident that Jesus has not entered it, and he cannot give it hope. Christ cannot be divided: he brings to the soul at the same time two blessings which he never separates,—pardon and sanctification; he blesses us by turning away every one of us from his iniquities; and he who wishes the first of these, without the second, obtains neither.

We often deceive ourselves as to the cause of the disquietude which we feel, and the difficulty we have in laying hold of the promises of God. The cause is found more frequently than we imagine in some want of uprightness, some cursed thing which we are unwilling to put away. Think not that I mean to speak of those infirmities and sins, which we honestly bring to the foot of the cross; no, I refer to those which we do not bring there, and which we wish to retain with ourselves. Let each of us examine himself attentively in this respect, and be always ready to suspect some

want of uprightness as the cause which weakens his confidence. At least, it will be well for us frequently to say to God, with David: "Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I may not be ashamed," Psalm cxix. 18; and with Job, "Wherefore hidest thou thy face? what I see not teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do it no more." xiii. 24.

Having said thus much in reference to Hezekiah's trust in the Lord, we shall now speak, with as much brevity as possible, on the effects and success of that trust.

#### THE EFFECTS OF HEZEKIAH'S TRUST.

When we speak to the worldly of this trust in the Almighty, and would induce them to resign themselves entirely to that God who is faithful and is able to fulfil all his promises, they seem to be shocked. It would be convenient, indeed, say they, to trust God and do nothing for one's self; they accuse those who preach the necessity of faith, of leading men to live in carelessness and indolence, and they repeat continually that favorite maxim of human wisdom, "Help thyself and God will help thee." To such I would answer, It may be easy for a man to say, "I have faith in God," while he remains careless and indolent; I know it may be easy to say so; but this, too, I know, that these are not the fruits which a true faith produces. Faith is the calm, the repose, but not the sleep of the soul. It is not a soporific which congeals the blood in the veins, but a balm which diffuses its soothing and healing influence through the whole frame, and imparts to it health and vigor, and strength to act. "Faith," saith the Scripture, "worketh by love." He who conceives of it as a thing that lulls the faculties of man to sleep, and enchains his activity, has no true idea of its nature.

And how do we find that it influenced Hezekiah?—We read that “in the first year of his reign and in the first month,” he set himself to work to commence a reformation in his kingdom. For sixteen years the people had been plunged in an idolatry sanctioned by the king; they had become habituated to it by long practice; the priests had countenanced it; the high priest himself had given no opposition to the orders of the impious Ahas; “he did,” as the Scripture tells us, “all that king Ahas commanded.” 2 Kings, xvi. 16. It was under these unfavourable circumstances that Hezekiah ascended the throne; but, far from being discouraged by difficulties, he set his hand to work to execute what he owed to God. He did not say to himself, I must wait, I must have patience, I must go on quietly; I shall meet with too many obstacles, I am not yet sufficiently established on my throne. He made none of these false calculations of man’s wisdom which are founded on human probabilities. He made but one calculation, that of trusting in the Lord, and being persuaded that in dependance upon his strength he ought confidently to attack an idolatry which he could not allow to exist for a moment without sin.

Such, my brethren, is the effect which the faith of a Christian, when lively, produces. It makes him act with energy, being strengthened by the grace of Christ. It makes him say, like the apostle in the midst of his weakness: “When I am weak then am I strong; I can do all things through Christ which strengthened me. I am more than conqueror through him that loved me.” On the contrary, nothing is more discouraging than looking to men, to possibilities, to events. It is when we do this that we are led to say with Moses, seeking to evade the commission with which the Lord had entrusted him, “Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh, and

that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? Behold they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice, for they will say, the Lord hath not appeared unto thee—I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue—O my Lord, send I pray thee by the hand of him whom thou wilt send.” Exod. iii. 11; iv. 1, 10, 13. It is then we say with the Israelites: “We are not able to go up against this people: for they are stronger than we.” Num. xiii. 32; xiv. 3. It is then that, waiting to think of our misery and pondering over it with a spirit of despondency, we say with the Jews: “Our bones are dried and our hope is lost;” and with Jeremiah, in the time of his despondency: “Thou hast removed my soul far off from peace: I forgot prosperity. And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord.” Lam. iii. 17, 18.

But in what consisted the reform which Hezekiah undertook? In two things: first, “he removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves,” and thus he destroyed all that pertained to the worship of idol gods. Then “he brake the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto these days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan,” that is, “a piece of brass.”

Such are the effects which an evangelical trust produces, when it is first implanted; or when it is revived in the soul. It gives a man courage and strength to destroy “the high places,” pride and self-conceit; “to break in pieces the images;” all those images of the creatures which we set up in the heart and worship; “to cut down the groves,” those secret lurking places of the soul where iniquity is committed. It overturns the idols set up in secret; “cuts off the right hand and plucks out the right eye;” and establishes in the heart, upon the ruins of the idolatrous worship of self and

of the creature, the worship of the true God. "The grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this world." Tit. ii. 11, 12.

Moreover, as Hezekiah brake in pieces the brazen serpent, because it had become an object of worship, though it had been set up by Moses, and was a representation of Christ lifted upon the cross, so does the Christian's trust destroy, as a means of justification, things in themselves good, but which with time have become to us a false support, and an occasion of self-righteousness. I mean all those parts of public or private worship, all those acts of devotion which have for their end to lead us to Christ, but which, if we are not on our guard, become, like the brazen serpent, an object of false confidence, turning the soul from Christ and causing it to trust in things which were only intended to bring it to Him. A scriptural trust in God, when it recovers its life and simplicity, restores these things to their place. It does not destroy them; but it destroys our confidence in them; and it restores Christ to his place, which is to be "ALL IN ALL."

#### THE SUCCESS OF HEZEKIAH'S TRUST.

Let us now see what success the Lord vouchsafed to the labors which Hezekiah undertook in dependance upon Him. It seems to have surpassed his expectation, though his religious reformation met with some difficulties, such as every good work is sure to encounter. It is said that "the hand of the Lord was in Judah to give them one heart to do the commandments of the king and of the princes, by the word of the Lord." 2 Chron. xxx. 12. At first the priests were slow to resume their ordinary occupations in the temple; and

it is said, that "the Levites were more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests." 2. Chron. xxix. 34. But it is remarked, that afterwards these same priests, "were ashamed, and sanctified themselves and brought in the burnt offerings into the house of the Lord." xxx. 15. Thus the zeal of the one excited that of the others, and Hezekiah not allowing himself to be discouraged by the first difficulties, obtained the success which is promised, and is always granted, to a persevering dependance upon God.

The zeal of Hezekiah had led him to send messengers to the ten tribes which belonged not to his kingdom, inviting them to return to the Lord, the God of their fathers. On the one hand, there was little prospect of his succeeding with these tribes now long accustomed to idolatry; while, on the other, God seemed to have prepared the way for the pious designs of Hezekiah, by afflicting the kingdom of Israel a short time before with severe judgments. The messengers of Hezekiah did not every where meet with a favourable reception; for it is said "they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them." "Nevertheless," it is added, "divers of Asher, and of Manasse, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem." 2 Chron. xxx. 10. And such was the zeal with which the passover, which they celebrated "with great joy," filled them, that returning home they "brake the images in pieces, and cut down the groves, and threw down the high places and the altars out of all Judah and Benjamin, in Ephraim also, and Manasseh, until they had utterly destroyed them all." 2 Chron. xxxi. 1.

Such was the success which attended Hezekiah's trust in God. "The Lord," in whom he trusted, "was with him whithersoever he went." The Lord, who honors these that honor him, never disappoints the

confidence of those who rest upon him. It is written, "Commit thy way unto the Lord and trust in him, and he will bring it to pass." Ps. xxxvii. 5. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths." Prov. iii. 5. 6. Let us then be assured that where there is a sincere trust in the Lord, there will be, sooner or later, deliverance and success. Are there, then, any who wish to effect a reformation in their own hearts, in the church, or in the world; any who would root up old habits, reform long-established abuses, overcome obstinate resistances? Let them put their trust in the Lord, as Hezekiah did, and they shall not be confounded. Things which seemed to offer them insurmountable difficulties, shall become possible, because the Lord, to whom nothing is impossible, shall act for them. They shall learn by experience, that "faith removes mountains," and that "all things are possible to him that believeth." By the prayer of faith, the gates long closed shall open before them, as the gates of Peter's prison opened before the angel that conducted him. Acts xii. 10. It is useless, my brethren, absolutely useless, when we meet with resistance within us or without us, to think of overcoming it by our own will, or our own efforts. The gates which we thus attempt to force will continue to resist us, until we learn this lesson, that it is Jesus alone who opens, and that "by strength shall no man prevail." Instead of wasting your strength in vain efforts to overcome what is stronger than you, humble yourselves and feel your own weakness; "seek the Lord and his strength:" say with David, "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him." Ps. lxxii. 5. This sincere and childlike dependance on the Lord will act like the oil which



we put on the hinges of a door that has long been closed, and which facilitates its movement, so that it turns in the hand almost without any resistance. It is the Lord that "opens the two-leaved gates; that breaketh in pieces the gates of brass, and cuts in sunder the bars of iron." Isa. xlv. 1, 2. Be assured that it is to a want of confidence we are generally to attribute the little success which attends our undertakings. We wish to accomplish them ourselves, we labour in dependence upon ourselves; now you know there is a curse denounced against the man that "trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm;" and the word of God gives a death-blow to all his enterprises, addressing to him this awful declaration: "The Lord hath rejected thy confidences, and thou shalt not prosper in them." Jer. ii. 37.

#### APPLICATION.

My brethren, this trust in the Lord, which we have been inculcating on you, is both our duty and our happiness.

It is our duty, because God enjoins it on us; and he deserves it, inasmuch as he unites infinite wisdom and infinite power with a boundless love for all those that put their trust in him. To give our confidence to any other being than God, is to say, that that being is more wise or more powerful, or more loving than God. It is by a natural consequence to give that being the place of God in our hearts; for the being to whom we give our confidence, is also the being to whom we give our heart—the being whom we fear above all things to lose, and which becomes our God. "Where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also." If it be upon our riches, our talents, our knowledge, our prudence, or any creature, that we rest our hopes, that

being, on which we make our happiness depend, will be our treasure: and there will our heart be also. Hence Jeremiah says of the man who "trusteth in man," that "his heart departeth from the Lord."

This is just what happened by the revolt of our first parents: man seduced by the declaration of Satan, "Ye shall be as Gods," chose to listen to his own wisdom, instead of trusting to what God had told him; he left his own place to take the place of God; and from that time, in all ages, he has more or less openly worshipped himself; he has, as the Scripture saith, "sacrificed to his own net, and burnt incense to his own drag." Read the works, listen to the conversation of the unregenerate who are still in rebellion against God; they breathe nothing but the idolatry of a man who admires himself in his own works, and who, as the Scripture saith, "bows down before the work of his own hands." They boast of man, of his wisdom, his industry, his dignity, and his strength; they seek no succour for human ills, but from human means; in a word, they raise not their views above the earth. Some notion of God may, indeed, remain, but it is easy to perceive that it is merely a form. The unregenerate man, to speak plainly, leaves to God the titles, but reserves to himself the honour and confidence, which belong to Jehovah alone. But what does the Gospel do when it brings man back to his God, and rescues him from his rebellion? It restores him to his proper place by taking away all confidence in himself. It makes him acquainted with his absolute misery, that being freed from the delusions of pride, and feeling that without Christ he can do nothing, he may be led to put "his faith and hope in God," and live to bless and to love him who hath given him "everlasting consolation and good hope through grace." From that

moment God resumes his place in the heart of man, for God becomes his all, by becoming his hope. From that moment his rebellion against God ceases, because the heart cannot be in rebellion against him in whom it trusts. Thus are explained and justified the blessings promised to him who trusts in the Lord, and the maledictions denounced against the man who puts his confidence in any other than him.

We have said that trust in the Lord is our happiness as well as our duty. Is it possible to be happy while we trust not in God, while we depend on the strength or wisdom of man and make flesh our arm? If you saw a place full of sharp spikes where there was only a spot here and there on which you might with great circumspection tread without being wounded, would you feel easy if you saw a weak and ignorant child obliged to walk in that dangerous path? And would you not tremble for him if you saw him entering on such a perilous expedition in dependance on his own wisdom and strength? Alas! we are like that feeble child; we walk in a path, where we meet at every step innumerable dangers both to the body and to the soul. How then can we have a heart at ease if we walk in it, trusting to ourselves?

Shall we be at peace while we imagine that our temporal interest depends upon the elements, the seasons, on public or private events, on the good or ill-will of others whose interest may be connected with or opposed to our own; while we make our own existence, or that of beings who are dear to us, our lot or theirs, to depend upon a thousand circumstances independent of our will, in the midst of which we are of necessity obliged to walk? Can we, unless we be the deluded victims of pride or of improvidence, have a moment's peace, while we travel the difficult path of life

in reliance on ourselves? Is it surprising that some persons have lost their reason on seeing their plans in a moment destroyed, their enterprises disconcerted, and the beings whom they cherished snatched from them by death; seeing their human supports fail, and the future presenting them with the prospect of a thousand misfortunes which they were unable to ward off? And to take a particular example, what peace can a father or mother enjoy when they see their beloved child, the son of their fondest affections, laid upon a bed of suffering, and struggling with disease, if they make his life depend upon the skill and penetration, more or less, of a physician, or upon a possible error in a medicine, or in the time of administering it; if they are constrained to watch the eye of the physician, and await his answers as the decisions of life or death? If that child be taken from them, how will it increase their agony to think that his death depended upon such an error or such an oversight which might have been prevented. No, there can be no peace except for him who trusts in that God who holds in his hand the thread of all events, who makes them all work together for good to them that love God, and who was pleased to tell us in his love, "The very hairs of your head are numbered: fear ye not therefore."

With regard to spiritual things, can we be happy confiding in ourselves, in a world where we meet with continual objects of temptation, where Satan incessantly roams about our path with the subtilty of a serpent, and the rage of a lion, and where we continually carry with us a heart which is a world of iniquity? And where is the peace, where is the repose of that man who trusts in himself, and places not his confidence in the Lord? He goes round a continual and wearying circle of resolutions, and falls. A fall leads

to a new resolution, which he hopes will be more lasting than the preceding, and this is followed by new falls as great as the former. If it seems, sometimes, that shame for his continual relapses gives him a degree of energy which enables him to carry off a momentary victory, he soon succumbs again, and is plunged as deep as ever in the mire where he finds no footing. His punishment resembles that of the unhappy man whom the pagan fable represents as condemned to roll to the top of a mountain a ponderous stone, which, every time he approaches the summit, escapes from his hands, and rolls back to the point from which he had started, thus continually renewing his toilsome and ineffectual labour. So long as we place not our confidence in the Lord; so long as we commit not our heart into the hands of Him who "is greater than our heart," who alone can change it, and turn it as he pleases; our heart being the same, will continually lead us into the same errors, for "out of it are the issues of life." My will is not master of my will, and until, by a dependance upon God, I have obtained that "his strength should be perfected in my weakness," until his irresistible voice has calmed and subdued my passions, I shall be like "the troubled sea which cannot rest," and "whose waters cast up mire and dirt." If wearied by so many unavailing efforts, a man receive not a lesson of confidence in God, he must end either in despair or in a hardness of heart similar to that of the Jews, who, in the time of Jeremiah, answered the prophet, "There is no hope, but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart." Jer. xviii. 12.

We have rather described the misery of the man who trusts not in the Lord, than the happiness of the man who puts his confidence in him, because the

happiness of confiding in the Lord appears in a manner self-evident. To say of a man that he trusts in the Lord, seems to say without any need of proving it; that he is a happy man. Hence the Scripture contents itself with frequently repeating: "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is." To trust is to repose, to trust in the Lord is to repose upon the wisest, the most powerful, the most tender, the most faithful of friends. Can you then doubt the happiness of the man who trusts in the Lord? Must not that man be happy, who, to every anxious thought about the future that rises in his mind, can answer: "My heavenly Father knoweth what things I have need of;" who, to every difficulty which he meets can say, while he looks to Jesus crucified on Calvary; "In the mount, the Lord shall be found." "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" You may see the Christian "in heaviness for a season, if need be, through manifold temptations;" but you will find him, like Paul, "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; perplexed, yet not in despair; cast down, yet not destroyed." When the Christian finds himself in situations apparently the most hopeless; when every thing within him and without him appears dark and stormy; his trust in the promises of God shall be to him like "the bow in the cloud, a sign between him and his God," that he need not fear to be overwhelmed by the flood. It shall be "an anchor to his soul both sure and steadfast which is cast within the vail, whither our forerunner even Jesus is entered for us." When the eye of sense can see no way of escape, the eye of faith and of hope shall find one in the glorious promise which assures the child of God that his Father "will not suffer him to be tempted above what

he is able, but will with the temptation make a way to escape, that he may be able to bear it." 2 Cor. x. 13.

Oh, happy children of God, who are partakers of this confidence and rejoicing of hope! In traversing this earth, where "man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward," it cannot be, but that you shall have your share of those sorrows which are common to the posterity of Adam, and of these afflictions which are peculiar to the people of God; it cannot be but that you shall weep with other men. But thanks be to God, you "sorrow not as those that have no hope." "As your affliction aboundeth, your consolation doth much more abound." You can be "patient in tribulation," because "you are rejoicing in hope." Instead of giving yourselves up to those continual lamentations over the miseries of life in which the worldly indulge when they are unhappy, and which they cannot silence by levity and vain dissipation, you can "comfort one another by your mutual faith;" you can stir up one another to "lift up your heads because your redemption draweth nigh." When the world says, in the accents of despair, All is lost, you can say with the apostle, "We faint not; we are always confident; for we walk by faith, not by sight." Where the man of the world is ready to become distracted from the number and weight of the afflictions which press upon him or threaten him, the Lord places on your head the "helmet of salvation," and you can say with David, "The Lord hath covered my head in the day of battle." In fine, when you have come to the moment when the hopes of the worldling "go down with him to the bars of the pit, and rest together with him in the dust;" instead of losing your hope, it is then you realize it; it is then your hope increases and kindles—you lay hold on eternal life, and closing your eyes upon the

vanity of this world, you open them to behold that which you hoped for here, and which you then obtain, because you patiently waited for it. Oh, happy, then, "is the man that trusteth in the Lord."

May the Lord increase in us this blessed hope. This should be the constant subject of our prayers. Methinks, my brethren, that the more I see what we have to expect here below in the way of trials and conflicts with the world and the flesh; the more I discern the near approach of those *last times* predicted in the word of God—those times of great tribulation and great conflict with Satan, who is "come down, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time; the more I see the storm gathering in the distance; the more that "wars and rumours of wars, and earthquakes in divers places," and all the other signs of the times reach my ears like the sullen and fearful noises which betoken the coming tempest, and summon us to prepare for its approach,—methinks, I say, the more do I feel pressed to invite you, as well as myself, to take advantage of the time which remains to strengthen our confidence in the Lord. When the sky is becoming red and lowering, and the tempest threatens; when the eagles are gathering together to the prey; when the chastisements of God are ready to be poured out upon the carcass of Christianity, in the bosom of which lives the infidelity of nations calling themselves Christians; this is the moment to hearken to the voice of Jesus, who is our "refuge from the storm," and who would "gather us together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings." This is the moment to see that we be rooted and grounded in him, that in the day of trial we may be like the house against which "the floods came, and the rain descended, and the winds blew, and it fell not,



because it was founded upon a rock." May our hearts be strong, resting upon the Almighty; then we may advance, so to speak, with our eyes shut, having our hand clasped in the hand of our God. If passing through obscure path-ways, where we see not the end, we are sometimes tempted to ask him, like a child afraid in the dark, My father, where art thou going, and whither art thou leading me? The voice of his love will answer us, "Be not afraid, neither be discouraged; for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." Jos. i. 9. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." Isa. l. 10.

I conclude, by praying with the apostle,—“Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.” I would recommend you to read the eighty-first Psalm, that you may be cheered by the promises of protection in times of affliction, which are there made to those that trust in the Lord, and love him with sincerity.

## MEDITATION II.

### THE TRIAL OF HEZEKIAH'S TRUST.

“ And the Lord was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth: and he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not. He smote the Philistines, even unto Gaza, and the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city. And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against Samaria, and besieged it. And at the end of three years they took it: even in the sixth year of Hezekiah, that is the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was taken. And the king of Assyria did carry away Israel unto Assyria, and put them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes; because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord their God, but transgressed his covenant, and all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded, and would not hear them, nor do them. Now in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah did Sennacherib king of Assyria come up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them. And Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish, saying, I have offended; return from me: that which thou puttest on me will I bear. And the king of Assyria appointed unto Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. And Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house. At that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria. And the king of Assyria sent Tartan and Rabсарis and Rabshakeh from Lachish to king Hezekiah with a great host against Jerusalem: and they went up and came to Jerusalem. And when they were come up, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is in the highway of the fuller's field. And when they had called to the king, there came out to them Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder. And Rabshakeh said unto them, Speak ye now to Hezekiah, Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this wherein thou trustest? Thou sayest,

(but they are but vain words,) I have counsel and strength for the war. Now on whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me? Now, behold, thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt, on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt unto all that trust on him. But if ye say unto me, We trust in the Lord our God: is not that he whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and hath said to Judah and Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem? Now therefore, I pray thee, give pledges to my lord the king of Assyria, and I will deliver thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them. How then wilt thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put thy trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? Am I now come up without the Lord against this place to destroy it? The Lord said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it. Then said Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and Shebna, and Joah, unto Rab-shakeh, Speak, I pray thee, to thy servants in the Syrian language: for we understand it; and talk not with us in the Jews' language in the ears of the people that are on the wall. But Rab-shakeh said unto them, hath my master sent me to thy master, and to thee, to speak these words? hath he not sent me to the men which sit on the wall? Then Rab-shakeh stood, and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and spake, saying, Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria: Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you: for he shall not be able to deliver you out of his hand: neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord, saying, The Lord will surely deliver us, and this city shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. Harken not unto Hezekiah: for thus saith the king of Assyria, Make an agreement with me by a present, and come out to me, and then eat ye every man of his own vine, and every one of his fig-tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his cistern: until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of oil-olive and of honey, that ye may live and not die: and hearken not unto Hezekiah, when he persuadeth you, saying, The Lord will deliver us. Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad? where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah? have they delivered Samaria out of mine hand? Who are they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand?" 2 KINGS, xviii. 7—35.

In the preceding meditation, we considered the nature of Hezekiah's trust, the reformation which it led him to undertake, and the success with which it was crowned.

We shall now proceed to consider the trial to which it was subsequently exposed.

Hezekiah having effected the religious reformation which he had projected, next undertook to deliver his subjects from the external enemies which oppressed them; and among others, "he smote the Philistines even unto Gaza, and the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city." It appears that he was generally successful in his warlike enterprises; for it is said, that "the Lord was with him, and that he prospered whithersoever he went." But the Almighty, with a view, no doubt, to try the faith of his servant, and probably also to punish the people for their idolatry during the preceding reign, allowed him to be defeated in his war with the king of Assyria. Though the divine historian, in relating this part of Hezekiah's life, tells us that he rebelled against the king of Assyria, yet it does not follow that he intended to censure this war as a culpable revolt. The tribute which Hezekiah's father had engaged to pay to the Babylonian monarch was, at the same time, a punishment for his idolatry, and an effect of the perfidy of that prince who took advantage of his weakness to oppress him. Ahaz being closely besieged by the Syrians, and having no trust in the God of Israel whom he had forsaken, engaged the king of Assyria, by presents, to come to his assistance. But, as it generally happens, when we lean upon an arm of flesh, and endeavour, by improper means, to extricate ourselves from difficulties, he only involved himself in greater embarrassments than those from which he sought to escape, and found that the false supports to which he had recourse turned to his confusion. "The king of Assyria," we are informed, "came to Ahaz, but strengthened him not." We cannot then think that Hezekiah acted wrong in shaking off the

evidently unjust yoke of the king of Assyria, who, in contempt of his promises of assistance to Ahaz, had compelled him to become his tributary. To this we may add, that the judges, who rescued the people of Israel from the oppression of strangers, are spoken of in Scripture as deliverers sent by God, and we cannot see why Hezekiah should be blamed for that which is elsewhere commended in others; particularly as it does not appear that he made any promise of obedience to the Assyrian king so as to give his revolt the character of a violation of a positive engagement. Those who consider him to have acted wrong, found their opinion on what is said in the present chapter, where we read, that when he was pressed by the king of Assyria, who had made himself master of his fenced cities, he sent unto him, saying, "I have offended; return from me; that which thou puttest on me will I bear." But may not this be regarded rather as a transient feeling of weakness on the part of Hezekiah, than as the confession of an act of injustice of which he accused himself before God?

Leaving, however, each one to form his own opinion on this subject, we shall pass on to the consideration of the lesson which we may derive from Hezekiah's care to effect a religious reformation in his kingdom, and purify it from idolatry, before he engaged in those wars, which had for their object the deliverance of his people from their foreign oppressors. Let us learn from this, that if we would hope for the interposition of the Lord, either to deliver us from our trials, or from the external enemies that are a cause of trouble to us, we must first put away from our hearts the sins on account of which, we have reason to believe, his hand is stretched out against us. These chastisements are the remedies which he employs to heal our spiritual diseases.

So long as the evil remains, the remedy must be repeated; and it is useless to expect that God will take away any trial while the sin for which it was sent renders its continuance necessary. Numerous passages of Scripture confirm this observation. Thus Moses says: "If ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, and to cleave unto him; then will the Lord drive out all these nations from before you, and ye shall possess greater nations and mightier than yourselves." Deut. xi. 22, 23. And, in the twenty-third chapter of the same book, the Lord addresses his people in the following language:—"When the host goeth forth against thine enemies, then keep thee from every evil thing." ver. 9. This passage is confirmed and explained by what we read in the book of Joshua, where we are told, that when that leader of the people of God complained to the Lord that "Israel turned their back before their enemies," the Lord said unto him, "There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel; thou canst not stand before thine enemies until ye take away the accursed thing from among you." Joshua vii. 8, 13. In the first book of Samuel, also, we find that man of God addressing the following exhortation to the people: "Put away the strange gods, and Ashtaroth, from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hands of the Philistines." vii. 8. Many other passages bearing upon the same subject might be adduced, but we shall content ourselves with adding two decisive promises made to those whose ways are pleasing to the Lord: "To him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God." Psalm i. 23. Again, "When a man's ways please the Lord, he

maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." Prov. xvi. 7. May the Lord inscribe this lesson of instruction upon our hearts, that when we are called to contend with external enemies, we may remember that the only way to conquer them is, (through that grace which is never withheld from those that seek it,) to conquer sin within us, and to put away the accursed thing from our hearts.

Previous to entering into the details of the trial to which Hezekiah's confidence in God was exposed upon his revolting from the king of Assyria, the Holy Spirit relates in a few words the destruction of the ten tribes by Shalmanezzer, of which we have a more particular account in the preceding chapter. Doubtless, it was not without some object that the Spirit of God referred to that event in this place. He may, perhaps, have intended to make us remark how the Lord was pleased to afford his servant an opportunity of completing the reformation which he had undertaken, before he exposed him to the trial of faith to which he was afterwards called. Hence it is said in the book of Chronicles (as if to point out this circumstance), "After these things and the establishment thereof, Sennacherib king of Assyria came, and entered into Judah, and encamped against the fenced cities, and thought to win them for himself." 2 Chron. xxxii. 1. The Lord, who favored the pious designs of Hezekiah, wishing to give him time for their accomplishment, occupied the Assyrians for several years in the war which they had undertaken against the kingdom of Israel. And thus it is that our Heavenly Father generally deals with his children. He occupies our enemies by throwing in their way some employment or other which obliges them to suspend their operations against us, until we are strong enough to resist their attacks. But while he thus affords

us a respite, he gives us to understand, by certain signs of the times, that we should be *always ready*; for the destruction of the ten tribes, which were also descended from Israel, was a serious warning to Hzekiah and his people. How merciful and compassionate is the Lord towards his people ! He does not seek to take them by surprise ; on the contrary, he wishes to give them time to strengthen themselves against the day of trial ; yea, he sometimes even allows them to discern its approach, that they may be warned to prepare for it.

Brethren, let us meet these merciful dealings of our God by having eyes to see and ears to hear, and let us not be like those who see many things, but take heed to nothing. We live in times when the signs of the coming of the Son of man begin to manifest themselves with sufficient plainness. For many years we have been hearing of wars and rumors of wars ; of nation rising up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and of famines and pestilences and earthquakes in divers places. Matt. xxiv. 6, 7. In our day, also, that declaration of our Lord is beginning to be fulfilled : " Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake ;" and that other prediction : " This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the world for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come." Matt. xxiv. 14. All these concurring signs invite us to discern the times ; to watch and pray always, that we may be accounted worthy to escape all these things which shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man. Let us take heed to ourselves, lest at any time " our hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon us unawares." Luke xxi. 34. Let us avail ourselves of the tranquillity which God affords us, to prepare for the day of contest. Let us act like king Asa, who, when the Lord gave him



rest, "built fenced cities in Judah, and made about them walls and towers, and gates of brass." Let us beware lest, absorbed in the affairs of this world, we merit the reproach which the Lord Jesus Christ addressed to the Pharisees, "Ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?" Let us beware of the disposition of that wicked servant who said in his heart, "My Lord delayeth his coming, and began to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards," so that his master came "in a day when he looked not for him, and in an hour that he was not aware of, and appointed him his portion with the hypocrites." Mat. xxiv. 48, 51. Let us beware of spending our precious time in useless and uncharitable disputes with our brethren, who are our fellow-servants. But "let us rather labour, that when the Lord cometh we may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless." 2 Pet. iii. 14.

The fall of the kingdom of the ten tribes may also have been connected with the history of Hezekiah; because it was a means which the Lord made use of to encourage him in the religious reformation of his kingdom, as it shewed him the severe chastisements with which he visited the idolatry of the house of Israel. The calamities which overtake Christians who apostatize from the truth are an awful warning, in which the Lord saith, "consider the goodness and severity of God: on them which fall severity; but towards thee goodness: if thou continue in his goodness, otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." Rom. xi. 22.

The Lord might also have intended to guard Hezekiah against the danger of putting his trust in men, in the hour of trial, by shewing him how little the succour of Egypt had profited the king of Israel, who, leaning upon that broken reed, had found to his confusion, that

instead of supporting him, it only entered into his hand and pierced him. Happy is it for us when the Lord instructs us by the example of others, that we may not entail upon ourselves similar chastisements by imitating their unbelief.

**HEZEKIAH BEING ATTACKED, SHEWS HIS CONFIDENCE IN GOD, LOSES IT, AND AGAIN RECOVERS IT.**

When Hezekiah was attacked by the king of Assyria, his confidence in God did not make him neglect the natural means of defence which lay within his power. "He took counsel with his princes and his mighty men, stopped the waters of the fountain which were without the city, built up all the wall that was broken; made darts and shields in abundance, and set captains of war over the people." 2 Chron. xxxii. 2--6. From this it appears that a real confidence in God by no means precludes the exercise of a reasonable foresight, nor the use of all the legitimate means of preservation which the providence of God places within our reach. But it is to be observed, that though Hezekiah used the means, he did not place his confidence in them. Having assembled around him his principal officers, he addressed to them that short exhortation, in which he ascribes all the glory to God, and expresses so strongly that confidence in Jehovah which formed the groundwork of his character: "Be strong and courageous, be not afraid or dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him, for there be more with us than with him: with him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah." 2 Chron. xxxii. 7, 8.

But there is nothing perfect in the heart of man,

and even where we see confidence in God predominating, we find moments of distrust and weakness. Of this we have a striking exemplification in Hezekiah at the period of his history which we are considering. Seeing that his fenced cities had fallen into the hands of the Assyrian king, who was every moment drawing nearer to Jerusalem, he becomes alarmed, and sends a messenger to him, saying, "I have offended; return from me: that which thou putttest upon me will I bear." To pay the tribute which is imposed upon him, Hezekiah takes "all the silver which was in the house of the Lord," and which he ought to have regarded as sacred, and "cuts off the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the pillars which he himself had overlaid." Observe here the strange inconsistency in Hezekiah's conduct which the Spirit of God notices. In a time of peace and tranquillity, he enriches the house of the Lord, and spares no expense to establish his service at Jerusalem. In an hour of trouble and danger, he loses for a moment that confidence in God which he displayed at the commencement of his reign. He takes back from the Lord what he had formerly given him, and places more dependance on the gold and silver of the temple than on the God of the temple himself. What poor, weak children of God we are! In the time of prosperity, we trust in the Lord: we seem even to trust in him, so long as the trial is not carried too far: but when it comes upon us with re-doubled force, when the wind becomes violent, we fear and begin to sink, and in our alarm we are sometimes even induced to make use of means for our deliverance which God disapproves of, and which he can never bless.

Never can we sufficiently bewail the unfaithfulness of those children of God who dishonour their Heavenly

Father by supposing that he is unable to deliver them without their having recourse to means which he condemns. The Scriptures have taken frequent occasions to notice such infirmities in the lives of the believers whose history they relate: that, on the one hand, we may learn to be watchful, and that he that standeth may take heed lest he fall: and on the other, that those of God's children who may have experienced such moments of weakness may be animated and encouraged to return to their God, seeing that he has in so many instances mercifully pardoned and restored his servants after similar falls.

We see, indeed, in the case of Hezekiah, as of all the elect of God, the accomplishment of that blessed promise of the Holy Spirit, "Though the righteous fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand." Psalm xxxvii. 24. Hezekiah did not fall to rise no more, and he could apply to himself the words of David, "When I said, My foot slippeth, thy mercy, O Lord, held me up." But observe what it was that became, in the Lord's hands, the means of his recovery; a circumstance which, to all appearance, was just calculated to produce the contrary effect. Sennacherib, violating his promise, and taking no account of the tribute which Hezekiah had paid him, continued the war, and sent a powerful army against Jerusalem to besiege it. It was at this critical moment that Hezekiah recovered his trust in God, and henceforth we see him, while blocked up by the besieging army in the holy city, committing his cause to the Lord, and calling upon him with a child-like simplicity and freedom, to deliver him out of his distress. It is thus that the Father of all mercies deals with us when we depart from him to seek deliverance from the arm of flesh;

by his overruling providence he makes all the false supports on which we depend, break in our hands, and thus turn to our confusion. Our work being nothing but hay and stubble, is burnt up; our trial becomes more and more severe; our way becomes so difficult and so beset with thorns, that we are compelled to acknowledge our folly, and to return to that God whom we have forsaken, and who alone is able to deliver us. It is then that the soul, enlightened to see the difficulty of a way where it is not supported by a confidence in God, says with the spouse of whom the prophet speaks, "I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now." Hos. ii. 7. What mercy and condescension in our God to be always ready to receive us with open arms, even when we are brought back to him by the urgency of our distress, after learning by sad experience the impossibility of doing without him! How good, how worthy of our love, is that forbearing and forgiving husband of our souls, who says to us, "Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, yet return again to me. Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My father, thou art the guide of my youth?" Jer. iii. 1, 4.

RAB-SHAKEH COMES TO SUMMON HEZEKIAH—GENERAL  
REFLECTIONS ON HIS DISCOURSE

We now come to the period when Rab-shakeh, one of Sennacherib's generals, presents himself before Jerusalem, demanding a parley with the king, and when he delivers in the audience of the messengers, whom Hezekiah sent unto him, that impious and insolent harangue, which seems to contain an abstract of all the arguments which Satan makes use of to shake the faith of the

believer. It is easy to see, that he was trained up in the school of him, whom the Scripture designates as the "father of lies; and the accuser of the brethren; who accuseth them day and night." We shall examine this discourse in detail, considering it as a faithful representation of those which Satan too often addresses to our hearts; and by which he endeavors to plunge us into despondency:

Be not surprised if we say, that Satan speaks to us; he spoke to our first parents; he spoke to our Lord, when he tempted him in the wilderness; and if he now no longer appears under a visible form, he does not the less speak to us by the thoughts which he suggests to our minds. Did he not speak to David, when he provoked him to number Israel? 1 Chronicles, xxi. 1. Did he not speak to Ananias, when he "filled his heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?" Acts v. 3. And have we ourselves never heard his deceitful language in our hearts? Have we never experienced certain thoughts and suggestions, which, though we rejected them with horror, continued to follow us, and seemed to come from some malevolent being which sought to torment us? Yes, as the Spirit of God, to establish us in the truth, speaks within us, by forcibly applying to our hearts certain passages of Scripture adapted to our spiritual wants; so does Satan often speak within us by suggesting to our minds, thoughts, which he endeavors to persuade us come from ourselves, and sometimes even from God.

The first remark which we would make on the discourse of Rab-shakeh, is, that he directs the whole force of his attack against Hezekiah's confidence in God. In his discourse, he develops, if we may so speak, the diabolical text contained in the words with which he begins: "What confidence is this wherein

then trustest?" As if he said, Thy confidence is nothing, and will be of no avail to thee. This is the subject of his harangue.

As a believing dependance upon God is the foundation on which the whole work of the Christian rests, who, as St. Jude says, "builds himself up in his most holy faith;" as faith is the shield with which he "quenches all the fiery darts of the wicked;" and as it is by faith that he gains the victory over the world, the efforts of Satan are principally directed against faith, in order to destroy the foundation of the building, and wrest from the believer the most essential part of his armour.

The consideration of this is calculated to afford much consolation to those who feel their faith assailed by the enemy, and who at times are exposed to painful and distressing doubts. Such persons should reason thus: "Surely those perplexing doubts which come into my mind, far from convincing me that I am not a child of God, should rather encourage me to believe that I am one; for it is not the policy of Satan to attack the hopes of those who have no real and well-grounded reason to hope." The thief does not attempt to break into the poor man's hut, but into the house of the rich man, where he expects to find some valuable booty. And so it is with Satan. It is against those who are enriched with the pearl of great price that he chiefly directs his machinations. As to the unbelieving world, his object with regard to them is either to confirm them in their infidelity, or to make them fancy that they are Christians. If you converse with such persons, you will seldom find them distressed with doubts as to their spiritual state. Some of them mock and openly despise the Word of God; others who have a kind of religion, but not a religion of the heart, are perfectly satisfied that they are very good Christians,

and would be greatly surprised and even offended were others to doubt of their being so. Poor deluded souls! It is they that have reason to lament and weep over their unbelief. But you, children of God, whose faith the enemy assaults, you have reason to rejoice; for in attacking your faith, he virtually acknowledges that you are believers. You are happy in having something which excites the rage of Satan, and which he desires to wrest from you. Had Rab-shakeh been sent to address an impious king like Hezekiah's father, he would not have endeavoured to shake his confidence in the God of Israel. But Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, and, as this was the real ground of his security, the artful Assyrian, who knew it well, though he pretended to make light of it, assailed him in this point, and took, as the text of his discourse, "What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?"

Let us now see how this wretched instrument of Satan endeavors to attain his object.

And first, we would notice the pompous terms in which he speaks of his master: "Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria." Here let us acknowledge, to our shame, that it were well if the subjects of the King of kings were always to feel and to express the same reverence towards him, as the subjects of earthly powers do towards the masters whom they serve. And yet what is the glory of all earthly princes and conquerors in comparison of the glory of our God and Saviour, who "doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth," who according to his pleasure removeth kings and setteth up kings, and who has but to "arise and his enemies shall be scattered, and they that hate him shall flee before him?"

The pompous language of Rab-shakeh also admonishes us to be on our guard against one of Satan's



devices, which consists in endeavouring to intimidate the servants of God by high-sounding words and threatening language, boasting of a power which God has not given him, and seeking to terrify them with evils from which the strong arm of the Almighty is engaged to deliver them. Thus we read that when the apostles appeared the first time before the council of the Jewish nation, their judges, not daring to punish them because of the people, dismissed them with solemn and repeated threats. And, in like manner, Nebuchadnezzar also endeavoured to subdue the firmness of the Hebrew youths by telling them, "If ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" Dan. iii. 15. When Satan would thus endeavor to intimidate us by his threats, we may reply to him in the words of those young Hebrews to the king: "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter." The word of God supplies us with an answer to all such intimidations, when it tells us, "There shall not a hair of your head perish." Luke xxi. 18. "The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him, for he seeth his day coming. The wicked watcheth the righteous and seeketh to slay him; the Lord will not leave him in his hands." Ps. xxxvii. 12, 13, 32, 33. "Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled." 1 Pet. iii. 14. "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Mat. x. 28.

Let us, then, meet the threats of Satan with the promises of that God who is higher than the highest. He can secure to us what the mighty ones of the earth would deprive us of, and he can restore to us an

hundred-fold, what they may, if he permits, succeed in taking away from us. "The silver is his, and the gold is his; the earth is his, and the fulness thereof; it is he alone that killeth and maketh alive. If God be for us, who can be against us. The Lord is on my side; I will not fear; what can man do unto me?" If men have their threats, and if they sometimes put them into execution, the Lord also hath his (and O how much more tremendous,) which he will infallibly execute against those who continue in unbelief. It is a fearful thing to fall into his hands; but when Satan seeks to intimidate us by his threatenings, we can answer him in the words of the apostle, "We are not of them who draw back into perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." Heb. x. 26—39.

Such, indeed, should always be our language to the tempter; but as he knows that the flesh is weak, and as he has at times succeeded in shaking the courage of the most valiant, when permitted to sift them like wheat, it is no easy matter to put him to silence, and make him forbear his endeavors to persuade us that our confidence in God will avail us nothing. Rab-shakeh having commenced his discourse with these words, "Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?" proceeds in that haughty strain of declamation, in which he tells the people on the walls of the city what calamities they might expect if they refused to submit to his master. Standing and crying with a loud voice, that he might be heard by all, he treats Hezekiah as a deceiver who sought to delude them by saying that the Lord would deliver them; and he tells them that they ought not to hearken to his words.

But in what was all this pompous declamation to end in a few days? In the death of a hundred fourscore

and five thousand men of Sennacherib's army, and in the flight of Sennacherib himself, who was obliged to raise the siege, and return to his country, where he died by the hand of his own sons. What a contrast between his threats and his performances ! How insignificant is man when he presumes to fight against God and his people, and how should his threats move our compassion ! " His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate." Let Satan then rage and threaten, but let us rest in peace under the shadow of the Almighty's wings, and let us patiently wait for his salvation, blessing them that curse us, and praying to the Lord to make the wrath of man praise him.

We shall now enter into a detail of the arguments with which Rab-shakeh attacks the faith of Hezekiah.

The first argument which he brings forward is the little success which his trust in God had hitherto ensured him, and the inconsiderable means which he could command to oppose the king of Assyria. This argument, which he repeats twice, is contained in the beginning of the twentieth and in the twenty-third and twenty-fourth verses : " Thou sayest, (but they are but vain words,) I have counsel and strength for the war. Now, therefore, I pray thee, give pledges to my Lord the king of Assyria, and I will deliver thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them. How then wilt thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put thy trust in Egypt for chariots and for horsemen." 2 Kings xviii. 20, 23, 24. It was with similar arguments that the enemies of Jesus assaulted his confidence in God, when they saw him hanging upon the accursed tree, " He saved others," said they, " himself he cannot save. If he be the king of Israel, let him now come

down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God." Mat. xxvii. 42, 43. In like manner, the enemies of David, seeing him in trouble, said, "God hath forsaken him: persecute and take him; for there is none to deliver him." Ps. lxxi. 11. And he complains of similar reproaches, and expresses the anguish which they gave him, when he says, "Lord, how are they increased that trouble me? many are they that rise up against me. Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God." Ps. iii. 1, 2.

And thus also, even now, when the enemy of souls would shake the faith of the believer, he says to him: "Thou speakest well indeed! To hear thee, one would suppose that through thy trust in God thou couldst perform the greatest achievements. Thou art assured that through Christ Jesus thou shalt be more than conqueror over all thine enemies. Thou sayest that 'he that is with thee is greater than they that are against thee;' and that thou canst 'do all things through Christ that strengtheneth thee.' But where are the effects corresponding to these magnificent professions? What strength has thy trust in God given thee? What enemies has it enabled thee to overcome? Dost thou not feel the greatest weakness in thyself this moment? Art thou capable of contending with me in the smallest matter in thine own strength? Dost thou not feel within thee more corruption and misery, since thou hast begun to believe than before? "Thou sayest, but they are but vain words, I have counsel and strength for the war."

In such attacks as this Satan obtains the greater influence over us, from his assuming, as the ground of his accusation, a principle in accordance with the word of God, which tells us, that "the kingdom of heaven

consists not in word, but in power,"—that faith without works is dead—and that "if we know these things happy are we if we do them." What he says of our weakness also is true, as it regards the "old man, the flesh, which still wars against the spirit;" so that the child of God, after examining himself in this point of view, begins to say, "It is all too true; I have much profession, but little fruit; I speak of faith, but I often feel weakness; perhaps I am deceiving myself, and have never yet really believed."

In such a case, my brethren, the counsel I would give you is this. First humble yourselves before God, by acknowledging that there is a vast disproportion between your words and your actions; that your faith itself is but weak and imperfect, and that you have no reason to boast of its fruits. And then, notwithstanding all this, you may answer the enemy, "Shall I, by abandoning my trust in God, be enabled to perform more works? If I surrender up that which gives me strength, shall I acquire more strength?" "But," Satan may reply, "hitherto thou hast had nothing but a dead faith; thou hast never known what a living faith is." "Well then! supposing that to be the case, I will avail myself of the discovery, and apply for a living faith to Him who hath said, 'Ask, and ye shall receive.'"

But let us examine whether you who fear that you have only a dead faith, have any reasonable grounds for such an apprehension. You are afraid, you say, that you are not really children of God—that your faith is not a living faith. But is not this very fear a sign that you are not altogether without life? Have you ever heard of a lifeless corpse, shut up in its dark tomb, questioning whether it was alive or dead? The soul that mourns and condemns itself, because its faith is weak or without life, proves that it knows some-

thing of life. Now to know what life is, we must experience it ; so that to feel the want of it and really to desire it, we must have it to a certain extent, and we may apply to it what our Lord says of the Holy Ghost, " The world cannot receive him because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him." To appreciate his gifts, and desire them, is in itself a gift of the Holy Ghost. Be assured, then, that Satan exaggerates and lies when he tells you that you have only a dead faith.

As for your increasing sense of indwelling corruption with which the enemy reproaches you, far from being an evidence that you have not faith, it proves, on the contrary, that " God hath shined into your heart ;" and that what before was hidden from your view, " being now reproved, is made manifest by the light ; for whatsoever doth make manifest is light." Eph. v. 13.

And lastly, as to the weakness which you still feel in yourselves, and your frequent short-comings : while these ought to humble you before God, and to lead you to pray to him for larger measures of strength, that you may be enabled to obtain a more complete victory over your inward corruption, they ought not to make you despond as if they were a proof that your faith is not real. There was one, the reality of whose faith you cannot doubt, who, when speaking of his own humiliating experience, could say : " I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing ; for to will is present with me ; but how to perform that which is good I find not ; for the good that I would I do not : but the evil which I would not that I do. I find then a law that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man ; but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and

bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." Rom. vii. 18—23. If, then, you can trace these two principles within you struggling for the mastery, take comfort; your faith is not dead; it is the faith of the apostle Paul, and you may say with him, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Though sometimes defeated by the enemy, you can say with the same apostle, "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us." Jesus shall so fight for you by his power which worketh in you, that even your infirmities shall contribute to your victory, by rendering you more humble and more watchful. Through his strength that which seems most weak in you shall become strongest; the inward man shall be renewed day by day; "that which is born of God in you, shall overcome the world; and sin shall not have dominion over you, because you are not under the law but under grace." Hence you can say with David, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple. For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me upon a rock. And now shall my head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord." Psalm xxvii. 1—6.

The second argument which Rab-shakeh makes use of to shake the faith of Hezekiah, is, that in reality the ground of his confidence was not that which he had avowed, and that, while he professed to confide in the Lord, he secretly trusted in the assistance of Egypt. "Now in whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me? Behold, thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt, on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand and pierce him; so is Pharaoh king of Egypt unto all that trust in him."

We read of nothing in the history of Hezekiah which would lead us to believe that he had the least idea of depending upon Egypt for succour; but as Sennacherib knew that Egypt was the ordinary resource of the kings of Israel and Judah, when they were invaded by the kings of Assyria, he may have thought that Hezekiah looked to the same quarter for support, and that his boasted confidence in the Lord was a mere hypocritical pretence. For the same reason that charity "thinketh no evil," Satan, who is the opposite of charity, suspects evil in every thing; and, moreover, it is one of his devices to make us doubt the sincerity of our dependance upon the Lord Jesus Christ, that so we may be prevented from enjoying that peace which the feeling of real confidence in God is calculated to impart to us. Our confidence being seldom perfect, he takes advantage of its imperfection to persuade us that we are still trusting in our own righteousness. He insinuates that while we are continually speaking of the merits of Christ and of the nothingness of our own works and our own strength, we are at bottom but Pharisees, placing our dependance upon that strength and upon these works. What renders this accusation the more insidious is, that we have, in fact, some reason to reproach ourselves in this respect, and that we fear, lest,



in rejecting these charges of hypocrisy, we should be refusing to listen to the voice of the Spirit. And this apprehension is increased by the artfulness of Satan, who, when he assumes the garb of an angel of light, and accuses us of insincerity, adopts the very language of Scripture (for which he knows we have a profound reverence), and veils under it his perfidious attacks : so that we begin to say within ourselves, "Is not this the voice of God which speaks to me, and applies to me such and such passages of his word?" We may further add, in confirmation of this, that in speaking of Egypt as a deceitful support, which, instead of profiting those that trust in it, only turns to their confusion, Satan says many strong things, and uses almost the very terms which the Almighty himself employs. When threatening Egypt by the mouth of the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord says, "When they took hold of thee by the hand, thou didst break and rend all their shoulder; and when they leaned upon thee, thou brakest and madest all their loins to be at a stand." xxix. 6, 7.

When the accuser of the brethren thus taxes us with self-righteousness and want of sincerity, we must, as in the former case, in an humble dependance upon Christ, confess that he may have some reason for his accusations; and we should regard them as a serious call to strict self-examination. It is good to receive a salutary suggestion, even from an enemy; and Satan himself may unintentionally become the means of making us renounce our own righteousness more thoroughly, and take the Lord Jesus Christ more entirely for our all. When he attacks the sincerity of our confidence, it is a time to cry, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief! Lord, increase my faith! Give me grace that I may be rooted and grounded in Christ, and established in the faith, abounding therein with thanksgiving." Col. ii. 7.

It is by thus turning the attacks of the wicked one into matter for prayer, that we utterly confound him; for his object is not to lead us to pray, but, on the contrary, he manages his arguments in such a manner as to make us believe that prayer is useless. "Thou art a hypocrite," he says to us; "thou hast no real trust in God, and as God heareth not the prayer of the hypocrite, and as his promises are only made to faith, it is useless for thee to present thyself before him." Weak believers do not always perceive that this is the language of the "father of lies," who exaggerates every thing, and aims at making us confound weak faith with the utter absence of faith, and designing to crush it altogether, applies to a weak faith those passages of the Bible, which speak of unbelief and hypocrisy. Is it not a gross calumny to say of a soul that feels its tendency to trust in its own righteousness, that fears it, and prays to be delivered from it, that it is sunk in self-righteousness, and that there is no sincerity in its faith? Is it not to be the father of lies, to say of one who trembles lest he should be deceived with regard to his faith, that he is a hypocrite, and seeks to impose upon God by pretending to place his confidence in him? But Satan is artful, and knows well the character of those whom he addresses; and as he hardens some in hypocrisy by persuading them that what is said in the Bible of hypocrites has no reference to them; so he endeavours to terrify others, whose consciences are tender, by continually upbraiding them with their hypocrisy. But "the wicked worketh a deceitful work," and these painful doubts which the believer experiences as to the sincerity of his faith, invariably turn to his advantage. They are the furnace in which the gold is tried and purified from the remains of its dross, and the child of God comes out of them more sincere, more strongly

rooted and grounded in Christ, and more deeply impressed with the seal of the Spirit. When God allows his children thus to pass through the furnace, he sets limits to the temptation; he tempers the heat of the fire to the strength which he has given them, and foreseeing, in the purifying of their faith, the happy issue of the trial, he can apply to them the language which he addressed to his people of old:—"Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove, covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold." Ps. lxxviii. 13.

We are now come to the third argument of Rab-shakeh, and as there are no bounds to the insolence and falsehood with which Satan inspires those whom he employs as his instruments, you will not be surprised to find the Assyrian general imputing to Hezekiah, as a crime which deprived him of all claim to the divine protection, his zeal in destroying the high places, where the idolatrous worship had been performed, during the preceding reign: "If ye say unto me, We trust in the Lord our God? is not that he whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and hath said to Judah and Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem?"

Were any one to doubt, that Rab-shakeh could have had the audacity to put such a construction on a pious action, and to go so directly against evident and well-known facts, we would invite him to consider what passes every day around him, and in his own heart. Are not the intentions of the people of God continually misunderstood and suspected? Is not their zeal in the cause of God frequently made the subject of the most grievous misrepresentations? Do not their enemies venture to calumniate them in opposition to the most palpable facts, and to ascribe to them motives

and actions which their general character proves they must shrink from with abhorrence? When Satan finds a believer of a tender conscience, he continually endeavors to torment him by throwing suspicions upon the motives from which he acts. He will say, "thou art influenced by pride. With all thy zeal, with all thy pretended faithfulness, and with all thy strictness in separating the precious from the vile, the clean from the unclean, thou art but a Pharisee, straining a gnat and swallowing a camel; thou hast but a name to live, instead of real, vital godliness; thou art doing more harm than good to the cause of religion, and art a stumbling block to those whom thou wouldst bring to Christ."

Such is the language which he uses when he would harrass and distress the tender and scrupulous believer. On the other hand, when he meets with one who is meek and forbearing—one who seeks to win souls by love, and avoids as much as possible every thing that might wound or give pain; he adopts a different mode of address, and says: "Thou art weak and timid, and regardest thine own interest more than that of Christ; thou courttest the approbation of men, and the reputation of being moderate." "John the Baptist comes neither eating nor drinking, and they say he hath a devil; the Son of man cometh eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a friend of publicans and sinners."

My brethren, this is a trial through which you must expect to pass, and you should therefore lay your account to be wrongly judged and misunderstood of others. The Lord himself forewarned his disciples that men would "persecute them, and say all manner of evil against them falsely for his sake." Mat. v. 11. The church of Smyrna, which the Saviour addresses in terms of unmixed approbation, and to which he bears

witness, that in the midst of its poverty it was rich—even that favored church had to bear the calumnies of those who “said they were Jews and were not, but were of the synagogue of Satan.” Rev. ii. 9. When the walls of Jerusalem were building, the enemies of God’s people endeavored to damp the ardor of Nehemiah’s zeal, by repeating to him the false reports which were afloat about him, and which they had invented themselves. “It is reported among the heathen,” said they in their letter to him, “and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel, for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king according to these words; and thou hast appointed prophets at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words; come now, therefore, and let us take counsel together. Neh. vi. 5—7.

We see from the conclusion of this miserable accusation, that the object of it was to intimidate Nehemiah and shake his confidence, and to make him discontinue his work, by engaging him in disputes with his enemies. It is well for us to be acquainted with this device of our great enemy, and to bear in mind that he unweariedly endeavors to divert the builders of the temple from their work by his arguments and insinuations, and that from time to time, “the people of the land weaken the hands of the people of God, and trouble them in building.” Ezra iv. 3. We should remember that our Lord himself was accused of deceiving the people, of wishing to make himself a king, of forbidding the people to pay tribute to Cæsar, and that Satan even ventured to suggest to him a doubt of his being the Son of God, saying, “If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.”

In seeking, however, to guard you against the despondency which you might suffer from the calumnies of the world, and the accusations of Satan, when he endeavors to put a false construction upon your conduct, we would not encourage you to neglect a strict and salutary examination into the motives of your conduct, to which perhaps it may be the design of the Holy Spirit to lead you by these false imputations of the enemy. It is always useful for us to search our hearts, lest any improper motives should have obtained admission into them, or lest there should be any admixture of false zeal, pride, or remissness in the actions which we are reproached with. But if, after all, we find that our proceedings are in accordance with the Word of God, and if, notwithstanding some alloy of imperfection, we are conscious that our intentions are in the main pure, we may take courage in the assurance, that the Lord in his mercy will pardon the evil and accept the good. The Master whom we serve is not a hard master, who takes pleasure in noticing the evil that is in us, and in depreciating the good which we do. But, on the contrary, when he is obliged to censure something in our conduct, he hastens to add for our encouragement, "Nevertheless, this thou hast." Rev. ii. 6. Take heed therefore, that you be not cast down by the calumnies of the enemy, and, above all, withdraw not your hand from the work of the Lord on account of some false step which you may have made, or some element of impurity which you may have detected in your motives. We may always pray to the Lord to rectify what is wrong in us, and to purify our hearts, but we must never imagine that we are at liberty to give up working for him. When there is a degree of uprightness, the heart become more pure as it proceeds in the

path of duty, like water which is filtered and purified in passing through the sand or earth which it moistens and fertilizes. Were the Lord only to be served by perfect beings, who then could be his servant in this world? Did he not accept as sincere those who must acknowledge a want of sincerity in many things, who could stand before him?

The fourth argument of Rab-shakeh affords a striking instance of impiety and presumption. "Am I now," he says, "come up without the Lord against this place to destroy it? The Lord said to me, Go up against this land and destroy it." It is thus that Satan, to dismay the people of God, presumes to threaten them in the name of the Most High, and to persuade them that it is the Lord who speaks to them when he tells them that they are lost, and that there is no more hope of their repenting. He brings forward against them those passages of Scripture which relate to the sin against the Holy Ghost and to final apostacy, and says with triumph, "You see how God speaks to you in his word; you have wearied his patience; he has cast you off, and will have nothing more to do with you; it is useless for you to think of moving him." "The Lord said to me, Go up against this land and destroy it."

Should you be exposed to such attacks of the enemy as this, be careful to examine the passages which he brings forward, and you will invariably find that they are misquoted, and wrested from their original meaning, and applied to cases to which they have no reference. If, for instance, after some aberration from the path of duty, Satan would apply to you that passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where it is said, "If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin"—consult the context, and you will find, that it speaks

of a man who has "trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and done despite to the Spirit of Grace," and consequently, that it cannot refer to one who has made a momentary fall from which he rises again, but to one who, after making a profession of the truth, wilfully plunges into sin, and becomes a blasphemer of the Lord Jesus Christ and of his grace. Indeed, we may observe in general, on this and similar portions of the Word, that it is never so much as intimated, that they who finally fall away, and perish in their apostacy, do at any time seek after, or even desire repentance in vain; but, on the contrary, we are told that "it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance," the meaning of which seems to be, that their hearts become so hardened, that they never feel a desire to repent. If, therefore, after a fall, you feel an inward contrition, or even a sincere desire to repent, you may be assured, that you are not of them that draw back unto perdition, for that very repentance, or relenting of heart, is itself the beginning, as well as the earnest, of your restoration.

It is from not well understanding this, that many of God's children have been greatly perplexed by that other passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the apostle, speaking of Esau, says, "Ye know how that afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." Heb. xii. 17. But here it is evident, that when it is said, "he found no place for repentance," the meaning is, that he was unable to prevail upon his father to change his resolution, and to make him repent of having transferred to Jacob the blessing which belonged to Esau, as the first-born. The apostle is not speaking



of a repentance for sin which Esau sought, and could not obtain, nor of a repentance which he had and which was rejected, but of a repentance or change of mind which he endeavoured even with tears to produce in his father Isaac.

If we examine the twenty-seventh chapter of Genesis, where this history is related, we shall discover in the profane Esau no symptoms of a real repentance for the sin which he had committed, nor any reason to believe that he sought that repentance.

As for the tears which he shed, they were evidently the effect, not of a godly sorrow producing repentance unto salvation, but of a sorrow altogether worldly, arising from regret for the loss of the temporal blessings connected with the rights of primogeniture.

The preceding reflections lead us to make a general remark which will enable you in every case, where the language of threatening is addressed to you, to distinguish between the voice of God and the voice of the enemy. When Satan threatens, it is to discourage the sinner, and so drive him from repentance, and from the cross of Christ. When the Holy Spirit threatens, it is to lead him to repentance, and draw him to the Saviour. Satan never approaches the soul but to steal, and to kill, and to destroy; the Holy Spirit never comes to it but to heal, to comfort, and to revive. When Satan cannot prevail to lull us into security in our sins, he endeavours to drive us to despair; when the Holy Spirit has not awakened us, and turned us from our iniquities, he seeks to bring us back by promises and encouragements. The language of Satan is, "there is no hope for you in God;" the language of the Holy Spirit is, "Return ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." Jer. iii. 22. Far from crushing the poor believer when he has fallen, our God

stoops down to him in his prostrate condition, and meets him in the depths of the abyss into which he is plunged. Our God and Father, who is the God of all consolation, and who hath given us a good hope through grace, runs to meet his prodigal son, when he sees him bending his penitent footsteps towards his paternal home—yea, he even invites his wandering children to return, addressing them in this encouraging language:—"Shall they fall and not arise? shall he turn away, and not return? Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the Lord: for I am merciful saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever." Jer. viii. 4; iii. 1, 12. "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Isa. lv. 7. "If any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." 1 John ii. 1.

Such is the language of the Lord in his word, and such is the language which he uses in our hearts, for he is always consistent with himself. If he has hard words against every sin, he has words of mercy and consolation for every returning sinner. He threatens the sinner only to make him renounce his sins. If he declares that he regards as an enemy the double-minded man, who makes the world his friend, it is only that he may engage him to hear these encouraging words, "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up." James iv. 8—10. If he tells the angel of the Laodicean church, that because he is "lukewarm he will spue him

out of his mouth," it is that he may prepare him for the counsel and encouragement which follows : " As many as I love I rebuke and chasten ; be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock ; if any man hear my voice, and open unto me, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me." Rev. iii. 19, 20. When, therefore, you hear within your heart reproaches and threatenings, unaccompanied by offers of pardon, be assured that this is not the voice of God, who willeth not the death of a sinner, but the voice of him who was a murderer from the beginning.

It was at the period of Rab-shakeh's discourse, to which we are now come, that the officers of Hezekiah respectfully requested the Assyrian general to speak in the Syrian language and not in the Hebrew, that the people on the wall might not hear what was said: Doubtless they feared lest the discourse of Rab-shakeh should shake their confidence in God, and engender in their hearts the evil seeds of impiety. This prudence on the part of Hezekiah's messengers should teach us that we ought, as much as possible, to avoid all such discussions as are calculated to offend or hurt the faith of weak believers. It should teach us also that we ought, as much as lies in our power, to keep those who are committed to our care, whether they be our flock, our children, or our servants, from seeing or hearing any thing that might create in their minds doubts with regard to religion. " Cease to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge. If sinners entice thee, consent thou not ; if they say, Come with us, walk not thou in the way with them : refrain thy foot from their path." Prov. xix. 27 ; i. 10, 11, 15. It was upon this principle that the apostle Paul, when at Ephesus, seeing that " divers were hardened and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the

multitude, departed from them, and separated the disciples ;" Acts xix. 9; and it was on the same principle that he exhorted Timothy, " Shun profane and vain babblings, which increase unto more ungodliness, and eat as doth a canker;" and, finally, it was upon the same principle that he counselled him to withdraw from those that were " doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings." 1 Tim. vi. 4, 5.

Rab-shakeh paid no regard to the respectful request of Hezekiah's officers, but, as is usual with wicked men he became the more audacious by being treated with meekness, and made the greater noise in proportion as he saw that it excited their apprehensions.

This preacher of impiety seems to have aimed at drawing the people over to his party, by proclaiming to them that he was sent " to all the men that were upon the wall," to forewarn them of the fearful doom which they had to expect, if they refused to surrender to the king :—" Rab-shakeh stood and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and spake, saying, Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria; thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you, for he shall not be able to deliver you out of his hands ; neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord, saying, the Lord will surely deliver us, and this city shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. Hearken not unto Hezekiah." Happy would it be for believers if they had always as much perseverance in the good cause as ungodly men have in the evil—if, in proportion as their enemies seek to silence them, they would lift up their voice with strength to proclaim the word of the Great King " whose they are and whom they serve," that Great King to whom belong " the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever and

ever." How much is it to be desired that we should always speak in the name of our God, with that assurance of faith, that full authority, which made Rabshakeh say as an answer to all objections and a substitute for all arguments, "Thus saith the king;" for, it is to be observed, that he does not undertake to prove what his master had said; but contents himself with merely repeating his words, persuaded that what he had spoken was true, and could not fail of being accomplished. May the Lord give us a similar respect for his word when we hear it proclaimed, or proclaim it ourselves to others! May the words "Thus saith the Lord," which virtually preface every declaration of holy writ, dissipate all doubts and silence all disputings, and stamp all the announcements of the Word of God with full authority, whether they be addressed to our own hearts or we address them to the hearts of others!

Let us here notice the splendid eulogium which Rabshakeh unintentionally passes on the faith of Hezekiah, when he supposes him to have said unto his people, "The Lord will surely deliver us." To say, It may be the Lord will deliver me, or I hope the Lord will deliver me, were to have a glimmering of confidence, but to be able to say, "The Lord will surely deliver me," is really to have that faith which staggers not at the promises of God. This is the language of a full assurance which inspires even the hearts of others with confidence, and which calls upon God to honor himself in keeping his promises on which we rely—it is to say, "Remember thy word unto thy servant upon which thou hast caused me to hope." Ps. cxix. 49. As there is nothing which the enemy more dreads than this full confidence in God, when the Lord is pleased to grant it, so there is nothing which he attacks with greater fury and perseverance. But thanks be to God, he has

no other arguments against us, as we learn from the example of Rab-shakeh, than vain declamation, in which he boldly asserts that they who have such confidence are themselves deceived, and are endeavoring to deceive those to whom they would impart it. Thanks be to the Lord, when Satan seeks to overturn our confidence, he is obliged either to say, that God hath not spoken, or that what he hath spoken is not true, or that he is not able to keep his promises: all which the Spirit of God, in the believer, testifies to be equally false and abominable.

We shall now proceed in our examination of the discourse of Rab-shakeh, and we here meet with one of his last arguments to engage the people to surrender. "Thus saith the king, Make an agreement with me by a present, and come out to me, and then eat ye every man of his own vine, and every man of his own fig-tree, and drink ye every man the waters of his cistern; until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of oil-olive and of honey; that ye may live and not die."

Drawing now to the close of his discourse, he conforms to the common rules of human eloquence, and brings forward last, the arguments on which he principally depends for success. He hopes to gain over the people by removing all their apprehensions as to the evils and inconveniences which they might anticipate from a capitulation, and by setting before them all the advantages which would certainly result from such a measure. He tells them, that instead of being exterminated, they should dwell for a time in peace and safety in their own land, and that afterwards they should be transferred to a country which he describes as so delightful, that instead of losing by quitting the

country which they occupied, they should in a temporal point of view be infinitely the gainers. Thus did Rabshakeh evince that he had been trained up in the school of him who seduced our first parents, by extolling the fruit of the forbidden tree, and shewing them that "it was pleasant to the eye and good for food," and thus tempted them by the lust of the flesh and of the eyes. Thus did he also prove that he was an imitator of him who, as his last and most potent temptation, displayed to the eye of the Redeemer "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them," saying, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me," Mat. iv. 9, 10; and thus at all times the most dangerous of all seducers have been those who "allured through the lusts of the flesh," hearts that were unstable, "promising them liberty while they themselves are the servants of corruption; for of whom a man is overcome of the same is he brought into bondage." 2 Pet. ii. 18, 19.

While the carnal nature is still strong in the believer, and not yet brought into entire subjection, one of the most dangerous temptations which Satan can make use of, to induce him to relax in the difficult warfare in which he is engaged, and to turn him aside from the faith, is to present him with a brilliant picture of the world and its lusts. It was to this temptation that the people of Israel yielded in the wilderness, when they longed after "the flesh-pots of Egypt, and when they wept and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? we remember the fish which we did eat in Egypt freely, the cucumbers and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic: but now our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all, besides this manna, before our eyes." And, through a similar temptation, some of the most valiant of the servants of God have fallen. It

was this that lulled the mighty Sampson in the arms of Delilah, and despoiled him of his strength, his liberty, and finally of his life. It was this that caused David's fall, drew him into adultery and murder, and subsequently plunged him in all those miseries, both temporal and spiritual, by which he was taught that it is "an evil thing and a bitter to sin against God." It was the temptation of the love of the world that induced Ananias and Sapphira to keep back a part of the price of their land, and lie to the Holy Ghost. It was this also that induced Demas to forsake the service of the Lord, because he "loved this present world." It was to the same temptation that Asaph was in danger of yielding, when, as he tells us, "his feet were almost gone; his steps had well nigh slipped; for he was envious at the foolish when he saw the prosperity of the wicked. Behold," said he, "these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency; for all the day long have I been plagued and chastened every morning." Nevertheless when Asaph came out of that temptation, he acknowledged that when his "heart was thus grieved," he was "foolish, and ignorant, and as a beast before God." Ps. lxxiii. 1—22.

My brethren, be on your guard against this temptation. Remember that Asaph, who, as to the prevailing disposition of his heart, could say, "whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee," confessed that there was a moment when he was "as a beast before God," judging of happiness only by the pleasures of sense, and envying the prosperity of the wicked. Remember, that this is a temptation to which we may apply the words of Solomon, in speaking of the wicked woman,



"It hath cast down many wounded, yea, many strong men have been slain by it." Prov. viii. 26. Remember that the word of God addresses to all classes of believers, even to those who are "strong and have overcome the wicked one," this impressive exhortation, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world; if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." 1 John ii. 14, 15. Watch, then, and pray, lest ye enter into temptation, for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Be prepared for the time when the enemy shall array before you, on the one hand, all the difficulties of your Christian course, and on the other hand, exhibit to your view all the attractions of the world and its lusts. He will say to you, as Jeroboam did to his people, when he would persuade them to renounce the worship of the true God, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem." He will say to you, like the wicked woman of whom Solomon speaks, "come, let us take our fill of love; stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." Thus "with much fair speech will he cause you to yield, with the flattering of his lips will he force you." If he finds that you are shocked at the thought of renouncing the faith, and abandoning your God, and that you are thereby kept back, he will have recourse to the artful proposal of Rab-shakeh, "Make an agreement with me." "It is possible," he will tell you, "to come to an accommodation; others have tried the experiment and found it to succeed; without altogether leaving the ground which you occupy, you may find a position, where the service of God and the enjoyments of this world may be made in some degree to meet. By being a little less strict in your principles, you will avoid much opposition, reproach, and difficulty; you will be able to retain many of your

earthly enjoyments, and at the same time you need not renounce the grace of God, who in the end will wash you from all your iniquities; you will enjoy the repose of a child of God "under your own vine and under your own fig-tree; you will drink the waters of your own cistern;" you will hear the faithful preaching of the Gospel, read good books, engage in pious conversation, continue to possess those means of grace to which you have been accustomed, but, at the same time, I will come and take you away to enjoy, in an honest way, the pleasures of a country like your own, where you will find all that temporal happiness which is consistent with sober and rational religion."

Ah, it is when you hear such language as this, that, with feelings of horror, you must exclaim, "Get thee behind me, Satan, for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve;" it is then you must stop your ears, and turn away abruptly from the enemy. It is then you must fall upon your knees, and cry, "Lord lead me not into temptation; but deliver me from the evil one! Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for mine help, and stop the way against them that persecute me." It is then you must open the word of God, and search for some of those passages which are like "sharp two-edged swords, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow;"—passages full of the power of the Holy Spirit, which penetrate the soul with the fear of God. It is then you must answer the enemy with a tone of decision, and say, "No compromise; no compromise. 'What concord hath Christ with Belial? and what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?' Is it not written, 'The love of the world is enmity.

against God?" Wretched enemy of my soul! were I to enter into a compact with thee, what would become of me? Were I for a little carnal enjoyment, a little of the glory, the pleasure, the riches of this world, to become one of those *fearful* whom the Lord rejects, one of those *lukewarm* whom he will spue out of his mouth, what would be my misery when I come to my last hour! What peace could I then enjoy if I had divided myself between the world and Christ; with what confidence could I think of presenting myself before the Lord after having followed the example of the double-minded man, who, seeking the friendship of the world, becomes the enemy of God. Oh, no! there must be no agreement, no compromise. 'No man can serve two masters. Get thee behind me, Satan, for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.'"

We now come to the last argument of Rab-shakeh—an argument which doubtless he regarded as the most powerful of all, because it was based upon facts. "Hearken not unto Hezekiah, when he persuadeth you, saying, The Lord will deliver us. Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and of Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah? have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who are they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand."

In the preceding argument, he had endeavoured to gain over the people, by describing to them the delights of the country, to which he promised to transport them, in case of their surrendering themselves into his hands, but he was well aware that the whole

force of this argument depended upon the supposition that Jerusalem could not possibly hold out against him, and that, consequently, it was better for them to surrender at discretion, and be removed to a pleasant country, than to perish in a brave but ineffectual effort to defend themselves. Rab-shakeh, therefore, felt the necessity of taking away from the Jews all hopes of being able to resist him with success, as otherwise, they might still say, "If, notwithstanding our weakness, the Lord should be pleased to deliver us, it would be better for us to remain in our own country which we know, to which we are attached, which the Lord hath given us, and where he hath blessed us, than to surrender ourselves to be transported to a distant land of which we know nothing, save by the glowing descriptions of those who seek our ruin." Fearing, therefore, lest this idea of trusting in the Lord should still be cherished, and frustrate the success of his preceding argument, he terminates his discourse by an appeal to facts, which seemed to prove, beyond contradiction, the hopelessness of their condition. As if he had said, "Profit by the example of others. Among all the nations which I have invaded, is there one whose gods have been able to save it? Have the gods even of Samaria delivered it out of mine hand? Have I not overturned the kingdom of Israel, which formerly made a part of the chosen people of God, and consequently was entitled to his protection? How then can you flatter yourselves that the Lord will deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand? Your strong holds are all taken; Jerusalem alone holds out against me; my armies are at the gates; and do you still expect to escape?"

And thus it is, that Satan endeavours to shake the faith of the people of God, saying unto them, Can

you expect to resist me, who for nearly six thousand years have reigned over the great mass of mankind ! See how the multitude obey me, each one walking according to the course of this world, allowing himself to be carried along with the stream. It is hopeless to think of acting differently from your neighbours ; you must follow your inclinations which are natural to you, and cannot be resisted. It is the height of folly and pride to think of living like a saint in this world. See also how many men among those who are called the children of God, and who for a time seemed to separate themselves from the world, have come back to it again, judging it impossible to stem the current, and to resist the propensities of their nature. Where now is the religious language which they used in times past ? and that confidence in Christ which they were wont to speak of as an invincible support ? and as for you, does not your own experience contradict you ? Are you not sometimes so sorely pressed that you are on the point of surrendering ? How often have you been vanquished the very moment after you had put your confidence in God, and prayed for strength to stand against the enemy ? How then can you pretend that the Lord will deliver you out of my hand ?

In answer to these reasonings, we would reply, first, that for the people of the world, it is no wonder if Satan leads them captive at his will, because they trust in their own strength, and seldom even make an effort to resist him ; and secondly, that as for those who seem for a time to put their trust in Christ, and then fall away, the Scriptures assure us that such persons have not a real faith and repentance, and that “ if they had been of us, they would have continued with us : but that they went out, that they might be

made manifest that they were not all of us." 1 John, ii. 19. It tells us that God, who begins the good work in us, "will finish it unto the end." It tells us, "that though the enemy may prevail to overthrow the faith of some, nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his." 2 Tim. ii. 19. They who finally fall away never really trusted in the Lord; for it is written, "None of them that trust in him shall be desolate." Ps. xxxiv. 22. Their fall, then, proves nothing against those who come to God with a true heart, and in full assurance of faith, or who, at least, pray to him to be enabled so to do; their fall cannot destroy the truth of these declarations of God's word: "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." "We are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." "My sheep shall never perish, and none shall pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

As for ourselves and the defects with which he reproaches us, we must answer in the first place, that if we have sometimes made a false step, it is not because it is useless to trust in the Lord, but principally because our confidence has not been sufficiently sincere. And then, that though Satan may sometimes be permitted to press us hard, while hope remains we are still secure. Hope in the promises of God is that strong fortress whose walls are salvation, and which never can surrender. So long as the Christian has hope, he will gain new strength, even at the moment when he seems on the point of sinking, and he can apply to himself the words of the apostle: "Dying, and behold we live." The Lord, whose ways are not as our ways, often leads us to victory by reverses, that no flesh may glory in his

presence, saying, "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me the victory." It would appear also that he is sometimes pleased to humble the adversary, by allowing him to carry off a temporary victory, which afterwards turns to his own complete confusion. When, then, Satan attacks us in this last entrenchment, crying out, that our confidence is in vain, and that it will not serve us, the oftener he tells us it is useless to trust in the Lord, the more firmly should we believe that this is just what he fears, that this is our strength, and that the Lord will send us deliverance. If he seeks to depreciate our faith, it is only because he is sensible of its value, and knows what achievements it can enable us to perform.

"Resist the devil and he will flee from you." James, iv. 7. "Resist him steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." 1 Pet. v. 9. "Seeing therefore, beloved, that ye know these things, beware lest ye also being led away by the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness: but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen." 2 Pet. iii. 17, 18.

## MEDITATION III.

### THE CONDUCT OF HEZEKIAH UNDER HIS TRIAL.

“ But the people held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not. Then came Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Josh the son of Asaph the recorder, to Hezekiah, with their clothes rent, and told him the words of Rab-shakeh. And it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord. And he sent Eliakim, which was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz. And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth. It may be the Lord thy God will hear all the words of Rab-shakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God: and will reprove the words which the Lord thy God hath heard: wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that are left.” 2 KINGS, xviii. 36, 37; xix. 1—4.

IN our preceding meditation, we have seen Rab-shakeh, the Assyrian general, coming forward to summon Hezekiah and his people to surrender, and delivering, under the walls of Jerusalem, and in the audience of the royal messengers, an impious harangue, in which he endeavours to ridicule and to overthrow their confidence in God. We have considered that discourse as a faithful representation of the attacks by which the enemy of souls too often seeks to shake our faith; we shall now proceed to consider how the officers of Hezekiah and the king himself acted on hearing it.



## THE SILENCE OF HEZEKIAH'S MESSENGERS.

The first thing that strikes us is the silence of Hezekiah's messengers ; a silence commanded by the king : for we read, "The people held their peace, and answered him not a word : for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not."

It is impossible to believe that Hezekiah forbid his officers to answer the ambassador of the king of Babylon under any circumstances ; for upon such a supposition, the conference would have been useless, and it would have been more simple to have declined it altogether. We may, therefore, presume that he only required them to keep silence in case that the envoy of Sennacherib should come to threaten and insult, as might have been anticipated, instead of offering reasonable terms of peace. From this first circumstance we shall derive many important lessons.

1. Let us learn that there are certain cases where it is our duty not to answer the enemies of the truth and of the people of God. When their attacks consist in reproaches dictated by passion and mixed up with personalities, calumnies, and impieties, this is a case where we are called upon to be silent, remembering the words of Solomon :—"If a wise man contendeth with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh there is no rest," Prov. xxix. 9 ; "Speak not in the ears of a fool ; for he will despise the wisdom of thy words." xxiii. 9. We should remember that there is "a time to keep silence," as well as "a time to speak," and that our Lord explicitly tells us : "Give not that which is holy unto dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." Mat. vii. 6.

In a case like that which we have described, when

attacks are made with ridicule or anger, without decorum, sincerity, or any real desire to be enlightened, silence should be observed, first, because it is the noblest part, and most worthy of the cause of God. A serious, and at the same time, mild and peaceful calmness opposed to such attacks, does more to shew the justice of our cause, and the injustice of that of our enemy, than any thing we could say. A manner of acting so uncommon may lead those who witness it to serious reflections; and certainly this silence is more calculated to confound our enemies than any answer we could make; for when it proceeds from the Spirit of God, it has an imposing dignity. When our Lord appeared before Pilate, "the chief priests accused him of many things, but he answered nothing; and Pilate asked him, saying, Answerest thou nothing? behold how many things they witness against thee. But Jesus yet answered nothing, so that Pilate marvelled." Imagine our Lord undertaking to refute all the false accusations of which he was the object. Would he have appeared with the same dignity? Would he have struck Pilate as he did, answering nothing, but leaving the calmness of innocence to be contrasted with the impetuosity of his accusers, hurried on by base passions. Imagine also the messengers of Hezekiah undertaking to refute all the injurious and impious charges of Rab-shakeh, and entering into a long discussion with him. Would they have appeared as dignified, and would Rab-shakeh have felt the same confusion as when all observed a profound silence, and retired, leaving the wretched man to his own reflections, with his impieties unanswered.

Besides, this silence of dignity is also a silence of prudence. Were we to answer in such cases, we should only injure ourselves; because we should

perhaps be tempted to overstep the bounds of calmness and moderation, and to let passionate expressions, hurtful to our own souls, escape from us. We should also run the risk of injuring those who attack us. The best answers will not be listened to by those who are influenced by passion; and often they only provoke them, and give occasion to new insults and new blasphemies. By silence also we sooner terminate discussion, and spare the hearers much offence. Let us then in such cases imitate our Lord, who, speaking in the spirit of prophecy, says, "I was as a dumb man that opened not his mouth. I was as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs." Ps. xxxviii. 13, 14. The apostle Peter exhorts us to follow this example, when he says, "What glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because that Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." 1 Pet. ii. 20—23. In this exhortation, remark especially the words, "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." Jesus, who was innocent of every thing laid to his charge, might have said, "My adversaries are all in the wrong; all the right is on my side; I must justify myself." Yet he did not do so, because he knew that all he could say would have been useless. In like manner, remember also that there are cases wherein, for the sake of peace and to avoid giving offence, you must put in practice the exhortation, "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in

him, and he will bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." Psalm xxxvii. 5—7. Remark also, under another point of view, the words, "In whose mouth there was no guile." Did not the Holy Spirit intend by this to teach us, that there is often *guile*, that is *evil*, in the mouth of him who is ever ready to answer and to justify himself? Have we never repented that we did not keep silence when we were attacked? Have we never said, Oh, that I had been silent, and prayed! How many angry words on the one side and on the other would I have prevented! How much more peace would my soul enjoy than it does at present?

May the Lord grant us to remember this lesson in due time, that we may be enabled "to walk in wisdom towards them that are without." Think not that it is only on great occasions that we have need to practice it. It is of more general application than we suppose, even in the ordinary course of life, and perhaps in the interior of our families, where we may have to deal with those who oppose the Gospel, and where perhaps silence is a duty. We may even be called to follow this rule towards our brethren in Christ, at times when, departing from the spirit of the Gospel, they unjustly attack us. In fine, we may be called to observe it in cases where others, to hurt us, or from other bad motives, report injurious observations which have been made upon us—cases where the best thing we can do is to shut our ears against all that we hear, and to imitate what is related of Saul at a time when he seemed to walk uprightly: "Children of Belial said, How shall this man save us? and they despised him, and brought him no presents; but he held his peace." 1 Sam. x. 27.

2dly, The silence of Hezekiah's messengers furnishes us with another lesson, for cases when we are inwardly assaulted by thoughts which the enemy of souls excites in our minds to shake our confidence, and which he mixes with reproaches and temptations of every kind, and sometimes with ideas injurious to the majesty of God and to his Word. In such cases, doubtless, we may refute Satan by the Word of God, following the example of our Lord, who always answered him, "Thus it is written." Nevertheless, in such cases there are many kinds of silence to be observed; and first, there is a "silence of humiliation and of mourning," as was that of Hezekiah's messengers, who not only held their peace, but also returned with their garments rent in sign of mourning. When Satan reproaches us, and suggests doubts and wicked thoughts to our minds, there are always grounds for humiliation. Though his reproaches may be exaggerated, they have always some foundation, and they should lead us seriously to reflect on the little faith and life which we have. As to the doubts and wicked thoughts of every kind which he suggests to our minds, we have in this also grounds for humiliation, because the temptations of the enemy, to a certain extent, find access to our hearts, and we do not immediately reject them with the whole strength of our souls. We have often even to reproach ourselves with having, in a manner, given place to the devil, and by our pride made it necessary for God to send a messenger of Satan to buffet us. Days of temptation, therefore, ought to be days of humiliation. They are a time to put our hand upon our mouth, not only before God, but also before man, and to observe towards others a certain silence, which may let them know that we are in a state of soul-abasement. They are a time to rend the garments, to have a heart humbled and broken, and

an exterior of humiliation. To such a case may be applied the words of the Lamentations of Jeremiah: "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke of his youth: he sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him; he putteth his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope; he giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach. For the Lord will not cast off for ever: but though he cause grief yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies; for he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." iii. 27—33.

In inward temptations, there is a second kind of silence to be observed, which I would call a *silence of submission*; and it consists in putting to silence a carnal impatience, which rebels against God's dealings, and murmurs on account of the frequent contests which he permits us to have with our spiritual enemies. We are tired of the combat; pride perhaps is weary of a state of soul habitually humiliating; we seek rest in this world, and would enjoy it without contest, while the Lord says, "Endure hardness as a good soldier of Christ." At least, we would have another kind of contest than that to which the Lord calls us; the lot of our brethren appears preferable to our own; and it seems to us that we have been more hardly dealt with than others, in the distribution of those inward trials to which believers are called.

My brethren, these are thoughts which we must silence for the glory of God, and for our own happiness. Can Satan sift us like wheat without the permission of the Lord? and if He permits him, shall we say, "What doest thou?" If it is to try our faith or to humble our pride, that he sends "a messenger of Satan

to buffet us," shall we murmur because he labors to promote our sanctification, and to make "our faith turn to praise, and honor, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ." Would we be crowned without "striving lawfully?" Is it not written, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life?" Is it not written, "Resist the devil?" Now to resist him is not to repine and to murmur, because he tempts us. See Jesus our model, who "was tempted, yet without sin;" he continually resisted the devil; he never yielded to him for an instant; but at the same time he submitted without murmuring to his temptations, and with an astonishing condescension he allowed Satan to transport him at one time to a pinnacle of the temple; at another, to the top of an exceeding high mountain. He did not complain of being tempted; and thus he has taught us by his example, that if, on the one hand, we ought never to yield to the temptations of the enemy through cowardice, we ought, on the other, humbly to consent to suffer his temptations as often and as long as it shall please the Lord to allow them.

Besides, what is the use of repining when you are exposed to temptations? What do you gain by struggling under the hand of him who humbles you, and who alone can raise you up again when the appointed time comes? May you not be reproached, as Job was by his friends, with "tearing yourself in your anger?" Job xviii. 4. You are like a man who, having a thorn in his flesh, enflames the wound by making vain efforts to take it out, instead of waiting for a skilful and tender hand to extract it. You add to the misery of a painful state of mind, the misery of impatience. You have doubts, temptations, and weaknesses, and you are discouraged and discontented, because you have them; a

second evil worse than the first. Oh! how much more happy would you be if you could put in practice that counsel which the Lord gave to his people Israel, and which that stiff-necked people refused: "Your strength is to sit still: in returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." How much more happy would you be if, instead of crying continually, "Woe is me for my hurt! my wound is grievous," you said with the prophet, "Truly this is a grief, and I must bear it." Jer. x. 19. With this submission to the will of God, you would find a kind of peace even in the most miserable condition, and in the midst of many contests. By this means you would hasten your deliverance; for it is written, "The salvation of the Lord is nigh unto them that fear him." Now, what is to fear him but to submit to all the humiliations through which he sees fit to make you pass; and you cannot doubt that such a respectful submission to dispensations mortifying to the flesh, is well calculated to move his compassion, and to make him lift up upon you the light of his countenance.

In cases of inward assaults made by Satan, there is, lastly, a silence which I may call a *silence of prudence and of precaution*, which consists in avoiding too long discussions with the enemy of our souls. The great attention which we give to any thing, often adds to its real importance; the more we dwell on the temptations of the enemy, the more do they take hold of us; we must listen to them as little as possible, and treat them as we would treat a troublesome person who will not hold his tongue, and whom we allow to speak on without giving him any answer. This is a great means to weaken the force of their impression upon our minds. Besides, we may say in a manner, that the breath of Satan is envenomed, and the longer we stop to dispute with



him, the more does the poison penetrate into our heart. In fine, there cannot but result much weariness from these long discussions with an enemy, who, being crafty, finds means to entangle us in the meshes of his subtle reasonings, so that we are unable to disengage ourselves, and sink down through fatigue. As soon as possible we must leave the tempter, and turn our back upon him. Instead of losing our time in useless conversations with him, we must go as Hezekiah did, and hold converse with God. What does the enemy of our souls desire above all things ? To draw us from God, by drawing us from confidence and prayer ; he desires by his reasonings and temptations to prevent us from going to the Saviour. What is the best answer to make him ? To go immediately to Him from whom he wishes to withdraw us, and to say to the tempter, Instead of losing my time in answering thee, I will go and pray. I will have recourse to Him in whom thou sayest it is useless for me to trust, or in whom thou reproachest me with having never really trusted.

#### THE CONDUCT OF HEZEKIAH IN HIS DISTRESS.

As soon as they told Hezekiah what the messenger of the king of Assyria had said, " he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord." Hezekiah did not consult with his principal officers what was to be done ; the first want which he felt was to go and pour out his soul before God, and to seek relief from him who is " our refuge and strength, and present help in time of trouble." But why did he not remain in his palace ? Why did he go to the house of the Lord ? Could he not enter his closet, and there having shut his door about

him, pray to his heavenly Father who seeth in secret? Yes, doubtless, but there were special promises made to prayer addressed to the Almighty in his temple at Jerusalem. In answer to the demand of Solomon, who asked that God would hear "whatsoever prayer or supplication should be made by any of the people of Israel, when they should spread out their hands in that house," which he had just built; the Lord had said unto him, "Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place; for I have chosen and sanctified this house that my name may be there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually." 2 Chron. vii. 15, 16. It was for this reason that Daniel, when he was at Babylon, "prayed three times a-day, his windows being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem." Daniel vi. 10.

Now, the temple of Jerusalem was a representation of Christ, who answers to it as to a type.—Christ is that Angel of the Covenant, of whom the Lord tells us, "My name is in him," Exod. xxiii. 21, as he had said of the temple of Jerusalem, "My name shall be there continually." "Christ is the Elect of God," Isa. xlii. 1, as the temple of Jerusalem was the house which "he had chosen." Christ is "he whom the Father hath sanctified," John x. 36, as the temple of Jerusalem was the house which God had sanctified. As the Lord had said of the temple, "Mine eyes and mine heart shall be there continually," in like manner he hath said of Christ, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." In fine, as God had said that his ears should be attent unto the prayer that should be made in the temple, so Jesus Christ hath said, "Whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he will give it you." Jesus Christ also called himself the temple of

God ; when pointing to his body, he said to the Jews, " Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it up again."—It is, then, towards this true temple of God—towards Jesus, in " whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily," that we must turn our eyes in all our afflictions. It is from a looking to him by faith that our prayers derive all their efficacy, and our soul all its consolation. It is to the feet of that Saviour, on whom all the promises of God rest, and who is the mysterious ladder by which all prayers ascend with acceptance to heaven, and descend again : it is to his feet we must flee for refuge, when Satan pursues us. This is the lesson which Hezekiah gives us, when, upon hearing the threats of Sennacherib, he goes to seek consolation and strength in the house of the Lord.

While Hezekiah himself goes to supplicate the Lord in his temple, he at the same time sends two officers of his household, and the elders of the priests, to Isaiah the prophet to make known to him his distress, and to request him to pray for him. " Then came they to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, covered with sackcloth, and said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and blasphemy : for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth. It may be the Lord thy God will hear the words of Rab-shakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God, and will reprove the words which the Lord thy God hath heard ; wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left."

We see from this, that Hezekiah feared not to declare what he felt to others ; he tells it to his officers, to the priests, to the prophet Isaiah. And what does he tell them he felt ? trouble, and such

trouble that he compares it to the anguish of a woman in labor, who has not strength to bring forth. And why this trouble? For two reasons: because of the reproaches which his enemies had cast upon himself, and because of the blasphemies wherewith they had outraged his God. Although Hezekiah lost not his confidence in the Lord, yet it would appear that the threats and insults of Rab-shakeh had struck him with a kind of dismay and terror. The flesh trembled, and he needed to come and revive his courage in the presence of his God, like his ancestor, David, who said, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee." He felt that, humanly speaking, Rab-shakeh had reason, when he represented to him the impossibility of being delivered with the inconsiderable means which he had in his hands. In this point of view, it was no wonder that his position seemed like that of an unhappy woman, who, at the moment of delivery, has not strength to bring forth. His grief was further augmented by the blasphemies which they had uttered against the God whom he loved, and by which they sought to terrify and corrupt the people committed to his care. In this distress he seeks relief in communicating it to those who could understand it, sympathize in it, and assist him by their prayers. He does it, without fearing to pass with them for a man of little faith and courage, and thus losing something in their opinion. He wishes to appear such as he is, and nothing more; and he prefers the prayers and consolation which an avowal of his distress might procure him, to the false satisfaction of being accounted more firm than he really was.

My brethren, every time I read the word of God, I am more struck with the simplicity with which the believers, whose history is there related, express

their fears and their distress ; and when I compare it with what I see among believers in our day, I cannot but fear, that they do not confess, with sufficient openness, their inward trials. I am aware that, under certain points of view, it may be injurious, when one is in a state of mind habitually painful, to speak of it too often, and repeat too often to our brethren the same lamentations. One may mix up with such a habit, much self-seeking ; may come to take a pleasure in these continual lamentations, may secretly make a merit of them, and become satisfied with them, as indicating a kind of humility and a feeling of misery, on which he may depend. Add to this, that too frequent lamentations may depress and discourage our brethren ; for sadness is communicated as well as joy. But on the other hand, when this depression is not the habitual state of the mind ; when it cannot be ascribed to a bodily weakness, which subjects the mind to nervous impressions, independent of the will ; when it cannot be attributed to a constitutional melancholy ; when it has succeeded a state of peace, and above all, when we can assign a cause for it, whether it be a fall, or some grief, or the fear of some calamity then it is our duty to tell it, as Hezekiah did, to those who may lend us the assistance of their prayers. If the king acted thus, it was not that he had not free access to the throne of grace ; but he had confidence in the prayers of a man of God, like Isaiah ; he believed in the efficacy of the united prayers of many of God's children, agreeing together upon earth, to ask something of their heavenly Father. He believed in it, and he believed not in vain, for soon he obtained a signal deliverance. It deserves also to be remarked, that in speaking of this deliverance, the Spirit of God observes, that Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah prayed

to God on the subject, and cried to heaven: 2 Chron. xxxii. 20. He does so, as if to shew us that it was this union in the prayers of two believers that obtained the deliverance.

Many are prevented from speaking openly, on the state of their soul, by a kind of false shame, or a fear of being misunderstood, or perhaps an apprehension that others would entertain doubts of their faith, and judge them with severity. They themselves perhaps regard their distress as a crime, and they are so tormented by it that it is increased by their self-reproaches. They imagine that the Lord looks upon them with an eye of displeasure, because they are cast down, and that if they were to tell him of the state of their mind, he would reprove them for it, so that they have just as much difficulty in confessing it to him as to their brethren, which makes them very miserable. Unhappy souls! what an idea you form of the God of all compassion! Though he may see some weakness in your affliction, yet he pities you, he pardons your infirmities, and you may, with all confidence, approach the throne of grace to obtain "help in time of need." How could he be displeased with us on account of our affliction, who, speaking of his people, says that "in all their afflictions he was afflicted?" Isa. lxiii. 9. How could he be angry at our distress, who hath said to us, "in the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world," John xvi. 33; and who hath forewarned his people that they should often find themselves in an anguish so great that he compares it, like Hezekiah, to the anguish of a woman in labor, and has promised them deliverance in such cases. John xvi. 20, 22.

Be not dismayed, then, even if you should find yourselves in a situation where your anguish of soul

should resemble that of Hezekiah. Be not afraid to be obliged to address the Lord in such language as this : " Lord, I have a sacrifice to make ; I think I would wish to make it, and that if my desire was a little stronger, I should succeed ; I think that with one effort more I could break the bond that holds me ; but I am almost exhausted, I cannot make this last victorious effort. Lord, have pity on me ! and let thy strength be made perfect in my weakness." Or, " Lord I would embrace thy promises with a full assurance ; I sometimes think I can almost touch them as it were with my hand, and that I am ready to lay hold on them, crying out with joy, They are mine ! But that moment my faith fails, and I let what I was going to seize escape from me ; Lord, I believe ; help thou mine unbelief. I am closely pressed by external enemies, with which I have habitually to contend ; I think if I had a little more strength, I could triumph over them by patience, and if I could pray with little more fervency, I should obtain the patience which I need. But that prayer which will not let the Lord depart until he gives a blessing, that prayer which I feel the need of, and which would bring deliverance, I cannot utter, and weariness always prevents me from following up what I have begun. Lord, teach me to pray always and not faint ; support my hands, as Aaron and Hur supported the hands of Moses, that they fall not down."

If in such cases, you feel the impossibility of obtaining deliverance of yourselves ; if you feel your heart pressed with anguish and distress, what do you feel more than Hezekiah, and many other believers, and even the Lord Jesus Christ himself, experienced. Hear David in the 55th Psalm : " My heart is sore pained within me ; and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon

me, and horror hath overwhelmed me. And I said, Oh, that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest." In like manner, in the 25th Psalm, 16—18, he says to God, "Turn thee unto me and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are enlarged: O bring thou me out of my distresses. Look upon my affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins." If you read the Psalms attentively, you will frequently find David expressing the deepest dejection of mind; sometimes you will hear him say, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am weak: O Lord heal me, for my bones are vexed. I am weary with my groaning; mine eye is consumed because of grief; it waxeth old because of all mine enemies." Ps. vi. 2—7. At other times he expresses himself thus: "There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger, neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin; I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long." In another place, you hear him saying in the name of the people of God: "Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of them that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud." Above all, you hear the Messiah himself, in many prophetic Psalms, complaining of the afflictions which he had to suffer. In the 69th Psalm, he complains in the following terms: "Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me also gall for meat and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." 20, 21. In the 22d Psalm also, he complains in similar language: "All they that see me laugh me to scorn;



they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted in the Lord that he would deliver him : let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him. Be not far from me, for trouble is near ; for there is none to help. Many bulls have compassed me : strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. Dogs have compassed me ; the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me. They pierced my hands and my feet : I may tell all my bones : they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture. But be not thou far from me, O Lord : O my strength, haste thee to help me." 7—20.

What ! when I hear my Saviour himself complaining of the distress, the ignominy, the grief, to which he was exposed, shall I, when in similar circumstances, fear to complain with Him and before Him, making him acquainted with the anguish of my soul ? What ! he himself said, " My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death : tarry here and watch with me ;" and shall I fear also to say, " My soul is sorrowful ;" shall I fear to acknowledge in such a state, that I feel the need of the consolations and society of my brethren !

There is, perhaps, more pride than we imagine ; there is, at least, a want of confidence and simplicity in our backwardness freely to pour out before God the whole bitterness of our soul, and to tell him all our fears, our weaknesses, and our conflicts. There is also pride, want of confidence and simplicity, in our unwillingness to open our hearts upon the subject to our brethren, and, in our thus acting before them, so to speak, a fictitious character, appearing stronger, more joyful, more submissive, or more courageous than we really are. Was Paul afraid to diminish the good opinion which the Corinthians had of him, by telling them, " I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much

trembling?" Did he fear to tell them, "We would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life?" 2 Cor. i. 8. Did he fear to tell them, that he was "troubled on every side, perplexed, cast down?" 2 Cor. vi. 8, 9. Did he fear to tell them, "When we came into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears?" 2 Cor. vii. 5. Paul was candid in the avowal of his conflicts and infirmities, because he gloried not in himself, and sought not to appear strong in his own strength. On the contrary, he "gloried in his infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon him. For when he was weak, then was he strong." Being single-minded, shewing himself as he was, and committing himself to Him who was his strength, he obtained "grace to help in time of need," and could say, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulations, that we may be able to comfort them which are in trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." 2 Cor. i. 3, 4. My brethren, when we are in an afflicted state of mind, let us learn to open the Word of God, and seek consolation there, by reading the simple and ingenuous confessions of God's children, who have endured these conflicts before us, and who have now entered into rest. Let us learn from them to be sincere and confiding towards God and our brethren in revealing to them our inward trials, that we may thus receive the comfort which the Spirit has promised to humble and confiding simplicity: "The Lord preserveth the simple," said David; "I was brought low, and he helped me." How had he been

simple? In that he had simply disclosed the state of his soul to God, as we see from the preceding verses, where he tells us, "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord: O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul." Psalm cxvi. 3, 4.

Let it not be supposed, that in seeking to cheer desponding believers, and to encourage them by the assurance that the God of all consolation is ready to listen to their complaints, we would engage them to rest in their despondency, and become satisfied with it. We conceive that joy is the privilege and duty of the Christian at all times, and that he ought to endeavour to "rejoice always," seeing that his God has commanded him to do so. But we must freely confess that there is a kind of joy of which we make but little account, even as there is a sadness, a conflict, and a distress of mind which we commiserate, and which, far from estranging us from a soul, is in our estimation a surer sign of life than many a joy, which, perhaps, its possessor boasts of. We make little account of a joy which is not joined to faithfulness; we fear a joy which tends towards levity. There may be a joy arising from the buoyancy of youth, the feeling of health, or from every thing succeeding with us for the moment—every thing smiling upon us. Sometimes, also, a certain kind of joy may be experienced by the Christian, when, deceiving himself, he walks in a way which is pleasing to the flesh, because it retains some favorite idol; he will laugh when a more sincere believer would weep; he will sooth himself in regard to many sins, by the assurance of pardon, of which he has formed a system and made a pillow of security; he will have the appearance of enjoying great liberty in Christ, but in reality the

secret of his apparent peace is, that he does not attack sin in its last entrenchments, and that he knows not the great struggles of those who seriously crucify the flesh with its affections, and in whom the Spirit of God pursues sin even into the inmost retreats of the heart. It is to be observed, that the Scripture tells us that they who receive the seed in stony ground, "receive it with joy." It is to be observed also, that in describing the double-minded, it represents them as having joy and laughter on their lips and calls upon them to weep: "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness." James iv. 8, 9. In fact, the Christian should aim at being always joyful, but the way to attain this end is often that wherein we "sow in tears," where we meet with tribulation in this world, and where "sadness of countenance" ends by making the heart glad. However, even in the midst of his sorrowing, the believer has a ground of joy arising from the hope which is in him, that enables him to say with the apostle, "Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." But after all, there is no real joy but what God gives, and to receive it we must come boldly to him when we are cast down, without fearing to be rejected or reproached by him on account of our despondency. It is to this that we wish to lead you by these reflections, and if we have attained this end, we shall have reason to bless the Lord for it.

We shall conclude this meditation by giving a summary of the reasons upon which Hezekiah founds his requests to Isaiah to pray for him. He seems to present three leading ones: the first is, that that day was a day of "trouble;" the second, that Rab-shakeh had "reproached" the living God; and the third, that there

was still a "little remnant" in Jerusalem to be saved.

After his example, the first motive on which we must rest our prayers, and excite others to pray for us when we are in trouble, is our trouble itself. Our God, who is merciful and full of compassion, refuses not to hear the cry of the afflicted. "He is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." Ps. xxxiv. 18. With so good a Father, the cry of anguish which his child utters, is of itself a powerful means to move the bowels of his paternal love. For, "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." Ps. ciii. 13. If you but say to him, "My God, I am in distress;" it will be enough to excite his compassion. "Have mercy on me," said David, "for I am in trouble;" and elsewhere, "Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me: for I am desolate and afflicted."

The second reason upon which Hezekiah founds his prayer is, that the Lord must surely have heard the blasphemies of Rab-shakeh, and the words wherewith he had reproached Him. As God does all things for his glory, we may be assured that he will come to our assistance, if his glory be concerned in our defence. That which constitutes our strength and our assurance in all our contests is, that our enemies are also his, and that in protecting us, he makes his own cause triumph, so that "he is exalted in having mercy upon us." Isa. xxx. 18. This was the motive which Moses often pleaded with the Lord when he made intercession for the people. "Now," said he, "if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard of the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness. And now, I beseech thee, let the

power of my Lord be great according as thou hast spoken. Pardon, I beseech thee the iniquity of this people, according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt even until now. And he said, I have pardoned according to thy word." Num. xiv. 15, 20. Asaph successfully employed the same motive when he said: "Remember this, that the enemy hath reproached, O Lord, and that the foolish people have blasphemed thy name. O deliver not the soul of thy turtle dove unto the multitude of the wicked: forget not the congregation of thy poor for ever. Arise, O God, plead thine own cause: remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily." Ps. lxxiv. 18, 22. The Lord has said, "He that toucheth thee toucheth the apple of mine eye." So that in all the unjust attacks of our enemies, we may say, "Lord, they touch me, defend the apple of thine eye. O God! defend thy glory which is interested in the salvation of my soul. O God! hear those that seek to shake my confidence, and endeavour thus to separate me from thee, and make me forsake thee. See, Lord, to what temptations I am exposed, and how I shall cause thy name to be blasphemed, if thou permittest me to fall. O my God, what glory shall redound to thee, if thou bringest to salvation such a weak and miserable creature as I am, if thou changest a heart so rebellious as mine! O God! support all thine Israel, lest if thy people stumble, their enemies should triumph over them, and exalt themselves against thee, saying, Their God was not able to deliver them."

The third motive on which he founds his prayer is, that there was still a "little remnant" in Israel for which there might be hope, and that all was not yet lost. "Wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that are left." The fenced cities of Judah were taken,

or were ready to surrender : Jerusalem alone held out. Yet there was therein a remnant from which deliverance might come, and this was a reason for hoping still, and consequently for prayer.

Here also is a plea which we may use with our God, when we call upon him in our distress—that there is still a little remnant within us. But how shall we know that there is such a remnant there, when we find within us nothing but emptiness and misery ? How, I would ask, knew Hezekiah, that there was still a little remnant in Judah ? There was still there a people who had not surrendered, and who requested others to pray for them. And where this is the case—where any one seeks to obtain deliverance or protection for himself by prayer, here there is a remnant for which we ought to pray. When, therefore, in your distress, you implore the assistance of God, and request the prayers of your brethren ; resting upon this act alone you can say, “ There is still in me a remnant of faith and of life ; all is not lost ; the enemy is not victorious, I have not yet surrendered ; for I pray. O my God, I supplicate thee for this little grain of faith by which I still look to Jesus, and unto his promises, I supplicate thee for this remnant which still remains ; rekindle the smoking flax, strengthen that which remains in me, and which is ready to die.”

God grant, my brethren, that these reflections, blessed by the Holy Spirit, may engage us to have a full and entire liberty before God in our distress ! Instead of being cast down, because we are cast down ; instead of being discouraged, because we are weary and heavy laden ; instead of being troubled on account of our very trouble, let us pour out our hearts before God like water, remembering, that while we pray, there is yet a little remnant by which all that seems to be lost

may be recovered. Let us remember that we are required to "pray always and not faint," and consequently, that while we still have life, however low may be the ebb at which our faith is found—however long we may have to wait for deliverance, we must still pray : for since it is written, "always pray," there is never a time when we may stop, saying, It is enough ; there is no more hope. The very act of prayer brings with it its own consolation. So long as we can pray, it is certain that there is in the soul the breath of life ; and where there is life there is hope. Let us then imitate the simplicity and perseverance of the man after God's own heart ; who, when he was weary with crying, without receiving an answer, cried still to tell God he was weary. "I am weary of my crying, my throat is dried : mine eyes fail while I wait for my God." Ps. lxi. 3. "Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord ! arise, cast us not off for ever. Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and forgettest our affliction and our oppression." Ps. xli. 23, 24.

Let those who have joy bless the Lord for it ; but let them not glory in it ; and let them beware of discouraging, by hard words, those who are in distress, reproaching them for it with severity or impatience. Let them remember, that we are commanded to comfort the afflicted, and that Isaiah reproached not Hezekiah when he sent to tell him that he was in the most painful trouble and anguish of soul. He answered him not, Where is thy confidence ? Wherefore dost thou fear ? Why art thou not joyful ? Is it thus that a child of God ought to behave himself in affliction ? No, Isaiah did better than reproach him, he prayed for him, and he obtained from God a promise of deliverance. You, who can rejoice yourselves, but have among you children of God that are sorrowing, imitate this example.



If your joy be of God, it will be accompanied with charity. Now "charity suffereth long and is kind;" it "supports the weak," is "patient towards all men," and "weeps with those that weep." If your joy leads you to be harsh and repulsive towards those who have it not, I would entreat you to examine carefully of what kind it is, and to see if you have not reason to be sad, and to weep in your turn.

May the Lord enable us all, amid the afflictions inseparable from this warfare in which we are engaged, to find in a simple and sincere faith in the promises of God, joined with fidelity, that sweet and serious joy which is the privilege of believers. That joy springs from hope and uprightness, and it is preserved by the habit of pouring out the whole soul before God, with the confidence of a child. May he who "fulfils in us the good pleasure of his will," give us to cast all our cares upon him, knowing that "he careth for us."

## MEDITATION IV.

### HEZEKIAH'S DELIVERANCE.

“ So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah. And Isaiah said unto them, Thus shall ye say unto your master, Thus saith the Lord, Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land. So Rab-shakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah: for he had heard that he was departed from Lachish. And when he heard say of Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, Behold, he is come out to fight against thee: he sent messengers again unto Hezekiah, saying, Thus shall ye speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed; as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezep, and the children of Eden which were in Thelasar? Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivah? And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord. And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord, and said, O Lord God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth. Lord, bow down thine ear, and hear: open, Lord, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God. Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone; therefore they have destroyed them. Now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only. Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed

to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard. This is the word that the Lord hath spoken concerning him; The virgin the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel. By thy messengers thou hast reproached the Lord, and hast said, With the multitude of my chariots I am come up to the height of the mountains, to the sides of Lebanon, and will cut down the tall cedar-trees thereof, and the choice fir-trees thereof: and I will enter into the lodgings of his borders, and into the forest of his Carmel. I have digged and drunk strange waters, and with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of besieged places. Hast thou not heard long ago how I have done it, and of ancient times that I have formed it? now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldest be to lay waste fenced cities into ruinous heaps. Therefore their inhabitants were of small power, they were dismayed and confounded; they were as the grass of the field, and as the green herb, as the grass on the house-tops, and as corn blasted before it be grown up. But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me. Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult, is come up into mine ears, therefore I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest. And this shall be a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such things as grow of themselves, and in the second year that which springeth of the same; and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruits thereof. And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall yet again take root downward, and bear fruit upward. For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion; the zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this. Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the Lord. For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake, and for my servant David's sake. And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Armenia: and Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead." 2 Kings, xix. 5—37.

"THE righteous cry," says David, "and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of their troubles." Ps. xxxiv. 17. This declaration, which is fulfilled, at all times, was beautifully verified in the case of Hezekiah. In our last meditation, we have seen him in the hour of his distress, sending messengers to the prophet Isaiah to entreat him to pray to the Lord for the remnant that was left in Jerusalem: we have seen him entering into the house of the Lord, to offer up his supplications there. The answer is not long in coming; the Lord who is nigh unto those that call upon him in sincerity, immediately puts into the mouth of his prophet, a word of deliverance which we shall now consider.

Isaiah answered unto the servants of Hezekiah, "Thus shall ye say to your master, Thus saith the Lord, Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land: and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land."

"Be not afraid." Such are the words by which the Lord removes the apprehensions of his servant Hezekiah, and such is the answer which he usually gives to his children when they call upon him in their distress; such is the word of consolation which he addresses at all times and under all circumstances, to the poor affrighted creature that flies to him for succour. "Be not afraid;" such were the words which he addressed to Jacob, when in his old age he was obliged to leave Canaan and go down to Egypt: "God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I. And he said, I am God, the God of thy father; fear not to go down into

Egypt, for I will make of thee a great nation." Gen. xlv. 2, 4. "Be not afraid;" such were the words which Moses addressed to the people of Israel, when terrified by the report of some of the spies who had been sent to search out the land of Canaan, they cried, "Whither shall we go up? Our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying, The people is greater and taller than we." Then Moses said to them, "Dread not, neither be afraid of them; the Lord your God, which goeth before you, he shall fight for you." Deut. i. 28, 30. "Be not afraid;" such were the words which the priest was to address to the people, when they drew nigh to their enemies to the battle; he was to say, "Hear, O Israel; ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your hearts faint; fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them; for the Lord your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you." Deut. xx. 3, 4. "Be not afraid;" such were the words which the Lord addressed to Jeshua, when he commissioned him to bring the people into the land of Canaan: "Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed; for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." Jos. i. 9. "Fear not," said Elijah the prophet, to the poor widow of Sarepta, who was on the point of dying of hunger with her child, having but a "handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse." "Fear not," said he to her, "for thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth." 1 Kings, xvii. 13, 14. "Fear not;" such were the words addressed to Daniel, when, terrified by a vision, he retained no more strength in him, and fell

into a deep sleep, having his face to the ground. "Then he that was clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz, touched him, and said unto him, O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong." Dan. x. 5, 19. "Fear not, for thou hast found favour with God;" such were the words which encouraged Mary, troubled by the salutation of the angel, who came to announce to her that she should be the mother of our Saviour. Luke i. 30. "Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." Luke ii. 10. Such were the words by which the angel of the Lord removed the apprehensions of the shepherds, terrified by his appearance, when he came to announce the birth of the Messiah. "Fear not," said Jesus to Simon, when he fell on his knees; in astonishment, and said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Luke v. 8, 10. "Be of good cheer, it is I; be not afraid," said Jesus to his disciples, when seeing him walk on the sea, "they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit." Mat. xiv. 26, 27. "Let not your heart be troubled; neither let it be afraid," said Jesus to his disciples, when they were sorrowful on account of their approaching separation from him." John xiv. 27. "Fear not ye, for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified," Matt. xxviii. 5—were the words of the angel to the women who came to seek for Jesus in the tomb, on the morning of his resurrection. When Paul was at Corinth, "in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling," 1 Cor. ii. 3, the Lord appeared to him in a vision by night, and said unto him, "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace, for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee." When the apostle John saw in his glory that Jesus, on whose bosom he had

leaned in the days of his flesh, he "fell at his feet as dead, but immediately Jesus laid his right hand upon him, saying unto him, Fear not; I am the first and the last; I am he that liveth and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore." Rev. i. 17, 18. In fine, "Fear not," are the words which the Lord addresses to his church, and to every believer therein individually. "Thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not, I will help thee. Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel: I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Isa. xli. 8, 10, 13, 14.

"Be not afraid." What comforting words, when they come from the mouth of our God who doeth according to his will, in heaven, and in earth, and in hell. Doubtless, they can give us little assurance when they are addressed to us by a feeble fellow-man like ourselves, who, perhaps, trembles himself, while he pronounces them. But these words which are weak, when coming from the mouth of a frail mortal, are strong, when they come from the mouth of the mighty God, even of him who holds in his hand all beings, all events, and all hearts; who is "wonderful in counsel and excellent in working," and who can say, "As I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand." These words, "Be not afraid," are mighty to strengthen when they are received by faith as coming from a Father full of love, who, laying hold on his child, with

his strong hand and outstretched arm, and bearing him as a man beareth his own son, says to him, as he presses him to his heart, My child, "Be not afraid." We may, indeed, in hearing them still experience some anguish or some fear; but, we must always feel ourselves strengthened from moment to moment by the power of these words, "Fear not." We are like a vessel in a storm, tossed about with violence, and washed by the waves passing over it in quick succession; but which, being fastened to a strong and well-secured anchor, rides triumphantly upon the waters, and braves the vehemence of the tempest. When these words, "Be not afraid," are applied by the Spirit of God to the trembling heart of the poor child of Adam, they strengthen him in the Lord, and by his glorious power; so that he can say with Daniel: "I was strengthened, and said, Let my Lord speak; for thou hast strengthened me." Dan. x. 19.

But to whom does the Lord say, "Be not afraid?" He says it not to the slumbering soul that knows not the labours and the combats of faith; He says it not to those who trust in themselves, or seek support from other men, or from the arm of flesh; on the contrary, he tells both the one and the other of these to be afraid, and seeks to arouse them by the terror of his judgments. But he says, "Be not afraid," to those who tremble at his word, to those who strive with Satan, the world, and their own heart: to those who know what it is to fear, and have found the truth of the Saviour's declaration, "In the world ye shall have tribulation:" to those, who, when they experience doubts or fears, turn to the Lord to have them removed, and to receive a word of consolation. To these, and to these alone, does the Lord say, "Be not afraid."

Observe also, the moment which the Lord chose to



say to Hezekiah, "Be not afraid," and to give him an assurance of deliverance; it was when he was in the deepest distress, when Jerusalem alone held out against the enemy, and when there was only a little remnant, closely besieged, which the Lord could stretch out his hand to save. And such are, in general, God's dealings with his children. In order to manifest his power in the most striking manner, he usually waits for the moment when, humanly speaking, there is no more hope of deliverance for them. When was it that Isaac was restored to Abraham? It was at the moment when the sacrifice was on the point of being completed; when Abraham "stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son;" when the heart of the father was about to receive the final blow; it was at that moment that the voice of deliverance reached him, and cried from heaven: "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him." Gen. xxii. 10, 12. When was it that Jacob was delivered from the fears, which the near approach of his brother Esau had excited in his mind? It was when he was almost in the presence of that brother whom he so much dreaded, and who was coming to meet him with four hundred men of war; it was at that moment, that Esau, who hitherto had appeared angry and inexorable, "ran and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him." Gen. xxxiii. 1, 4. When was it that Joseph was delivered from his trials? It was after he had passed thirteen years in bondage and in prison, and when he seemed to have been forgotten by every one, even by the king's butler whom he had charged to remember him. It was then that the Lord, who "looseth the prisoners," sent a dream to Pharaoh, which reminded the ungrateful butler of the Hebrew youth who had

predicted his prosperity ; it was then that Joseph was taken out of prison, and that Pharaoh made him second to himself in his kingdom. When was it that the Jews were delivered in the time of Esther ? It was when the decree was already published in all the provinces of the kingdom, " to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women." *Esth.* iii. 13. It was at this moment that God chose to overthrow their oppressor, Haman, and to raise Mordecai the Jew to honor in his stead ; so that " the Jews had joy and gladness, and in the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them, it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them." *Esther* viii. 17 ; ix. 1. When was it that Jesus came to the assistance of his disciples, tossed about in a little ship in the midst of the sea, by the fury of the waves ? It was not till the morning, after he had left them to struggle against the storm all night. *Mat.* xiv. 24, 25. When was it that Jairus received the assurance that his daughter should be healed ? When they came to tell him, " Thy daughter is dead, trouble not the master." viii. 49, 50. When was it that the woman of Canaan received the favourable answer which she so long solicited ? It was after receiving a moment before that reply, apparently so harsh, " It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs." *Mat.* xv. 27, 28. When was it that Peter was taken out of prison by the angel ? The eve of the day when he was to suffer death. It was during the night, which was, to all appearance, to have been the last of his life, that the Lord sent his angel to " deliver im from the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews." We see also, in the 107th Psalm, where the Royal Psalmist

describes the different ways by which the Lord leads men to repentance, that their deliverance usually takes place when their misery has come to a crisis: when "in their trouble, they cry unto the Lord, and he delivers them out of their distress." 6, 13, 19, 28. It is thus that the Lord, by rescuing his people generally when there is no more prospect of deliverance, glorifies himself in their weakness, and fulfils towards them that promise: "He shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor also, and him that hath no helper; he shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy." Ps. lxxii. 12, 13.

My beloved brethren, forget not the lesson of patience and of hope, which is suggested to us by all these examples recorded in the Word of the God of all consolation, who hath said, that "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning; that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." Rom. xv. 4. When, then, notwithstanding your prayers, you see your trials prolonged, the same temptations renewed, the same infirmities re-appear, beware lest you despair, and say that God does not hear you. In your opinion, the time for consolation may appear to be now; but the Lord says to you, "My time is not yet come." Before the Lord shews you his salvation, you require, perhaps, to be made more deeply sensible of your weakness and utter helplessness—all your carnal confidence must disappear, every external support must fail you. It is said, "The Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left." Dent. xxxii. 36. For the time, he in a manner says to us, as he did to Gideon: "The people

that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me." Judges vii. 2. As, then, the ways of God are such, and we cannot change them, the only counsel we can give you, when the Lord is pleased to make you pass through these humiliating ways, is that which the Holy Spirit himself gives us by the mouth of the apostle Peter: "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." 1 Pet. v. 6. Be assured, that impatience, discontent, despondency, can avail you nothing. The hand of God is powerful, and that hand which humbles you, alone can raise you up when the proper time arrives. Submit, then, to be humbled, weakened, exhausted, and, if I may so speak, broken down. Acquiesce in all God's dealings with you, waiting in a spirit of expectation, watchfulness, and prayer: "The Lord will do thee good at thy latter end," Deut. viii. 16; he will make "the bones which he has broken to rejoice," Ps. li. 8; "for the Lord will not cast off for ever; but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies." Lam. iii. 31, 32.

But let us return to Hezekiah. The Lord, in announcing to him, that he would deliver him from Sennacherib, at the same time made known to him the means by which that deliverance was to be effected: "Behold," he says, "I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land." God does not always tell us the means by which our deliverance shall be effected, as he did to Hezekiah; but this is a matter of little moment; it is sufficient for us to know, that he has promised that

“with the temptation he will also make a way for us to escape;” and that according to this promise we shall assuredly find that way. It is useless for us to perplex ourselves, by endeavouring to conjecture what that way shall be; it is by faith, and not by sight, that we must walk in this world. We must give glory to God, by saying, “I shall escape from the temptation, for God hath said it; I see not the way of escape, but he sees it, and in due time he will shew it to me.”

The rumour which Sennacherib was to hear was, that “Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia, had come out to fight against him.” Let us here remark on this subject, that God often delivers his people from their enemies, by means of quarrels in which they engage with one another. Thus it was, that when David was in the wilderness of Maon, surrounded by Saul and his people, who were on the point of taking him, “A messenger came to Saul, saying, Haste thee and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land.” 1 Sam. xxiii. 27. Thus it was that in a war against many nations united together, Jehoshaphat was delivered by a miraculous interposition of his God, who made the different enemies of his people fight against one another: “The Lord,” it is said, “set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, which were come against Judah: and they were smitten. For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them: and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another.” 2 Chron. xx. 22, 23. It was thus also, that Paul, when he appeared before the council of the Jewish nation, was delivered by a division, which a few words that he spoke, probably with this design, occasioned among

his judges. David also, who was not ignorant of this way of the Lord's of delivering his people, when he was overwhelmed with fears, "because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked," cried, "Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues." Ps. lv. 1—10. In another Psalm, after saying that God would shoot at them with an arrow, so that they should be wounded suddenly, he explains his meaning in the following verse, when he says, "They shall make their own tongues fall upon themselves." Ps. lxiv. 7, 8. Here let us observe with admiration how, at different times, God by confounding the language of his enemies, and making them that they cannot agree together, arrests their impious designs, and enables his people to pass through the midst of their enemies thus divided, in some sort, as the Israelites "passed through the waters of the Red Sea, which were a wall unto them on the right hand and on the left."

THE THREATS OF SENNACHERIB, WHEN HE DEPARTED  
FROM JERUSALEM.

Previous to his departure, the king of Assyria, enraged at being obliged to relinquish his prey, sent a letter to Hezekiah, in which he endeavors to keep him in a spirit of fear, by giving him to understand, that he meant to return again, and that sooner or later Jerusalem would be obliged to surrender. In this letter, he repeats the impious attacks of Rab-shakeh upon the confidence of Hezekiah. "Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hands of the king of Assyria." It seems that these words, "Let not thy God deceive thee," are a kind of infernal text, which the inveterate enemies of God's people repeat to them

with unwearied perseverance, to shake their confidence in the Lord. It is their constant habit to "shame the counsel of the poor, because the Lord is his refuge." Ps. xiv. 6. Since Satan also incessantly repeats his impious attacks upon our confidence in God, why should not we, the ministers of the Lord, as incessantly repeat those exhortations of the Holy Spirit, which are calculated to revive it? Why should we not say, with the apostle, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice. To write the same things to you to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe." Phil. iii. 1; iv. 4. Let us learn also from these threats of Sennacherib, when he was about to depart from Jerusalem, that it is one of Satan's devices to endeavor to keep us continually in a state of bondage which deprives us of joy and courage. Even in those moments when he is forced by the power of God to let go his hold, he seeks to prevent us from enjoying repose, by throwing us into disquietude with regard to the future, and telling us, as it were, The evil which you feared is only deferred; I will not lose sight of you; I will soon return again, and then you shall not escape me. In such cases, we may answer him, If thou returnest, the Lord also will return, for he hath said, "I will not leave thee nor forsake thee. Behold, I am with you always even unto the end of the world." Mat. xxviii. 20. And we may be assured, that if Satan returns, it will be to experience, like Sennacherib, an entire defeat. By the grace of Him who is in us, and is greater than he that is in the world, every fresh assault of the enemy tends to lead to a complete victory, and hastens on the moment when the Lord shall bruise Satan under our feet.

HEZEKIAH GOES TO LAY OPEN BEFORE THE LORD THE  
THREATS OF SENNACHERIB.

“ When Hezekiah received the letter, he went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord.” Here we see him acting in the same manner as he had done on a former occasion, when they reported to him the impious harangue of Rab-shakeh; from which we may learn, that the real children of God feel an habitual need of applying to Him in all their distresses. With them piety does not consist in certain good moments, thinly scattered here and there amid a life habitually estranged from God. The believer, by a bias natural to the renewed heart, turns towards his God in the hour of his affliction, as a sick child turns toward its mother to find in her bosom consolation and relief.

When Hezekiah entered into the house of the Lord, the first thing he did was to spread before him the letter which he had just received. “ Hezekiah,” says the Scripture, “ received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it, and went into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord.” This action is very significant, and teaches us that the first disposition which we must have, when we would present ourselves before the Lord, is simplicity, which consists in laying before him without reserve all the wants of our souls and of our bodies, and in telling him all our griefs with openness of heart. 1 Pet. v. 7. Hezekiah spread the letter before the Lord; he did not go to read it to one person and another; he did not act as we often do, go and complain to others of the injuries or offences which we imagine we have received; he knew that all this could have given him no consolation, and that though men might share



with him in his indignation on account of the threats of Sennacherib, they were unable to help him. He went to Him who is our strength and our refuge in time of trouble ; and as some one has well said, he took the letter and enclosed it in an envelope of prayer, to send it to God.

We see in the Scriptures that this ingenuousness is one of the principal characteristics of the prayers of God's people. When Jacob is alarmed at the approach of his brother Esau, he says to God : " Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of Esau ; for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children." Gen. xxxii. 11. Let us imitate this simplicity of the patriarch, and when we have any fears, let us say with ingenuousness to our God, I fear lest such and such things may happen to me or mine. Thus too, if like Hannah, we are bearing the unjust reproaches of those around us, so that we are constrained to resemble her when she wept and did not eat ; let us also resolve to imitate that servant of the Lord, who, being in bitterness of soul, prayed unto the Lord and wept sore, and entreated him to remove that barrenness which was the cause of the continual reproaches to which she was exposed. If we act thus, we shall soon find consolation, and there will be reason to apply to us what was said of Hannah, namely, that " she did eat, and her countenance was no more sad." 1 Sam. i. 5, 18. Again, when we are deeply distressed at seeing heavy afflictions falling upon those who are dear to us, and who, perhaps, have been useful to the people of God and to his cause, let us imitate the simplicity of Elijah, who, being afflicted at the death of the only son of the poor widow, who had received and fed him with so much charity, " cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with

whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?" 1 Kings xvii. 20. This same Elijah, when he fled from Jezebel, who was seeking after his life, being fatigued and exhausted by his journey, and saddened by perceiving his own timidity, sat down under a juniper tree, and, with childlike simplicity, laid open before the Lord his discouragement and depression of soul, saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." When the apostles came forth from the council of the Jewish nation, by whom they had been charged with many threats not to speak any more in the name of Jesus, after relating the matter to the brethren, they all, with one accord, lifted up their voice to God, to make known to him their situation, saying, "Lord, behold their threatenings, and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word." Acts iv. 29. If you would see numerous and striking examples of this simplicity in prayer, read the Psalms of David, and you will perceive how he was in the habit of "pouring out his complaint before the Lord, and shewing before him his trouble." Psalm cxlii. 2. Sometimes he complained that he was "the song of the drunkards," Psalm lxix. 12; that the "proud had held him greatly in derision;" that they "saw him and laughed him to scorn;" that his own "familiar friend had lifted up his heel against him." At other times, he tells him of the anguish of his soul, and says, "I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; my spirit is overwhelmed within me, and my heart within me is desolate; tears have been my meat day and night; while they say unto me, Where is thy God?" In fine, at other times, he tells him of his bodily evils: "There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger: my wounds stink and are corrupt, because of my foolishness; my loins are filled with a loathsome disease,

and there is no soundness in my flesh." Ps. xxxviii. 6, 7.

It is an honor we render to God, and an honor of which he is jealous, to confide to him thus freely all our griefs ; he himself urges us to it by his Spirit, when he tells us, "Trust in him at all times, ye people ; pour out your heart before him ; God is a refuge for us." Ps. lxii. 8. A father and a mother are jealous of the confidence of their children, and they are touched when those creatures, which are so dear to them, confide to them all their troubles, great or small, and come to deposit them without disguise in their bosom. This simple disclosure of all our griefs to God, which is our duty towards him, is also our happiness. Why do our griefs lie so heavy on our heart ? Because we allow them to rest there, without telling them to God. A faithless fear of wearying him, the unwarrantable apprehension that we have failings which we dare not make known to him, or the grievous habit of shutting ourselves up within ourselves, too often prevent this simple and detailed exposure of our wants, which so powerfully relieves the heart. We are never happy but when we can say to God, "All my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee."

The second thing which we remark in the prayer of Hezekiah, is the care which he takes to render unto his God the glory which the impious Sennacherib had endeavoured to deprive him of, by comparing him with the idols of the pagan nations which he had conquered, and by daring to maintain that he was as unable to defend his people, as they were to protect the nations that worshipped them. Hezekiah gives a just account of these idols, when he says, "They are no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone ;" therefore it is, he says, that the kings of Assyria "have cast them

into the fire, and destroyed them." In the following verse, he renders unto God the glory which was due to his name, when he says, "Now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of their hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only." This same confidence in the great power of God, this lofty idea of what he is and what he can do, which we find here expressed, is what our Lord intended to raise in us, as an essential element in prayer, when he placed at the head of that form which he dictated to his disciples, these words, "Our Father;" words which at once remind us of the great tenderness and the great power of the Being whom we address. It was by the same Spirit, that Hezekiah called to mind, on the one hand, the love of God, by addressing him as "the God of Israel," and on the other, his infinite power, by addressing him as "the God of all the kingdoms of the earth, the God that made heaven and earth." We find the same confidence in the power and goodness of God expressed in the prayer of Jehoshaphat, when he was attacked by a number of enemies united together against him: "O Lord God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?.....O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us: neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee." May the Lord grant that the more Satan and our natural unbelief seek to abase the glory and power of God, the more the Divine Spirit may exalt them within us, and give us to rise, by a confidence in his great might, above all those fears with which our enemies endeavour to inspire us! May we

ever be enabled to say, with firm and assured conviction, "All the gods of the nations are idols : but the Lord made the heavens. Some trust in chariots, and some in horses ; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. They are brought down and fallen ; but we are risen and stand upright."

We see also in the prayer of Hezekiah, that he interests the glory of God in his deliverance, and that he prays to be rescued from the hand of Sennacherib, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that he is God, and he only. It is a strong ground of confidence and a principal argument to make use of in our prayers, that the glory of God is concerned in our deliverance ; that our enemies are also his, and that his name shall be glorified, when he shews that, notwithstanding our weakness, he is able to save us. Happy are we, if that God who trieth the heart, can see, when he looks within us, that it is a solicitude for his glory which especially makes us pray for deliverance ! Happy are we, if we can say with truth, " My God, wilt thou allow me, by my impatience, by my attachment to the world, by my irregularity in my affairs, by not keeping a guard upon my tongue, or by any other similar neglect of duty, to give occasion to thine enemies to blaspheme thy name, or to dishonor the holy calling wherewith I am called ? Wilt thou allow my faith completely to fail, and my courage to be altogether destroyed, so that men shall be able to say of me, Where is thy confidence in God ? Where is the consolation and the strength which is imparted by that faith of which you boast, that it is ' the victory that overcometh the world ? ' "

Finally, we see in the prayer of Hezekiah a real self-abasement of soul, leading him to depend exclusively upon the Lord. Though he was a king, and ruler over others, he humbles himself before God as a poor helpless

creature, incapable of doing any thing of himself, and he says to him, with the humility and simplicity of a child, "Save us out of the hand of Sennacherib." It is true, that God had reduced him to such a state of distress, that it was almost impossible for him to put his confidence in any human resources. Nevertheless, it was happy for him that the grace of God had enabled him to profit by his humiliating circumstances; for so proud is man, that he sometimes chooses rather to perish in his self-conceit, or at least to consume away his existence in dreaming of imaginary resources in his difficulties, than simply and sincerely to fly to him who has said, "Call upon me in the time of trouble, and I will deliver thee." Let us beware lest we be taken in this snare; let us lay aside this proud habit of looking for some reason in ourselves by which God may be induced to come to our deliverance. Let us for ever cease to present ourselves before God with pretensions, and to be discouraged, because when we say, "Deliver me," we cannot rest upon some degree of strength or goodness, which hitherto we have possessed. May the Spirit of God teach us to say with childlike simplicity and unreserved freedom, "Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul! Lord, have mercy upon me, for I am as a man that hath no strength."

THE SECOND ANSWER OF THE LORD TO HEZEKIAH—HIS  
DENUNCIATIONS AGAINST SENNACHERIB.

The answer to Hezekiah's second prayer was not less speedy in coming than the former: "Before they call, saith the Lord, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking I will hear." Isaiah, the son of Amoz, was desired to send to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib, king of Assyria, I have heard."

The prophet then enters, on the part of God, into a long detail of threats against Sennacherib, and promises in favor of Hezekiah and his people. Without following these details, step by step, we shall endeavour to draw from them some useful instructions.

First, we observe, that the Lord severely reprimands the pride and impiety of Sennacherib, and calls him to account for them, saying, "Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel." If God often seems to disregard the blasphemies of his enemies, as he sometimes appears not to hearken to the prayers of his people, yet the time shall at length come when each shall receive an answer, and reap according as they have sown. The Lord, who is patient towards all men, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance," allows a certain time to the ungodly, during which they may put forth all the vileness of their impiety, and indulge themselves in blasphemies and outrages, without his appearing to regard them. Unhappily, instead of understanding that this goodness of God invites them to repent, they often take occasion from it to strengthen themselves in wickedness. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, their heart is fully set in them to do evil," Eccl. viii. 11. and they say, "Let the Lord make speed and hasten his work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it." They say, with the ungodly of former times, "The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it." Meanwhile, the mighty God, who now hideth himself, shall one day appear, to the confusion of his enemies, and then he will speak to them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure:

“ I tell you,” says he who shall judge the world, “ that every idle word that men shall speak they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment.” Matt. xii. 36. Let the ungodly then tremble, for they are treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God ; and what will be their confusion, when the Lord, whom they have blasphemed, shall suddenly appear before them in his glory, surrounded with his mighty angels, and say to them, as he said to Sennacherib, “ Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed ? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice and lifted up thine eyes on high ? even against the Holy One of Israel.” Again I say, Tremble ye ungodly ; “ for the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds, which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” Jude 15. Children of God, pray for the ungodly, and bear their outrages with patience, since God himself endures those by which they insult him to his face. Be not shaken when you see them braving the Almighty with impunity, during the time of his patience, and spreading like the green bay tree. Say not, like the people of old, “ How doth God know ? and is there knowledge with the Most High ? Behold, these are the ungodly who prosper in the world ; they increase in riches.” Say, on the contrary, Be it so ; yet God shall judge the just and the unjust. Remember that it is written, “ The Lord shall laugh at the wicked, because he seeth that his day is coming. The wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs ; they shall consume, into smoke shall they consume away.” Remember that it is written, “ Wait on the Lord and keep his



way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land : when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree : yet he passed away, and lo, he was not ; yea, I sought him, but he could not be found." Ps. xxxvii. 13, 20, 34, 35, 36.

Among the things with which the Lord reproaches Sennacherib, one is, that he had boasted by his messengers of the success which he had hitherto obtained, and which he still expected to obtain, by means of the multitude of his chariots. In the account which is given us of the discourse of Sennacherib's messengers, we do not find exactly the same expressions, as those which are here used. But God, who sounds the depths of the heart, saw all these boastings in the heart of Sennacherib, though outwardly he expressed himself with more moderation. From this we may draw two important inferences ; first, that God seeth that pride which makes us say, I have done, I have said ; I will do, I will say. It is to this that St. James alludes, when he says : " Ye rejoice in your boasting," and of which he tells us, " All such rejoicing is evil." The second inference is, that God judges us more by the feelings of our hearts, than by our words ; and that even when we are able to moderate the outward expression of our pride, he reads the development of it in the bottom of our hearts, and regards as spoken what is only thought.

Sennacherib had spoken in contemptuous terms of the God of Hezekiah ; and in addressing him he treats him as an enraged person and as a wild beast, which it is necessary to restrain with a hook and bridle. He executes towards him that sentence, " Those that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." He tells him, " The virgin the daughter of Zion hath despised thee,

and laughed thee to scorn ; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee." He tells him that he " shall not shoot an arrow into the city," and addresses him in this humiliating language : " Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult, is come into mine ears, therefore will I put my hook in thy nose and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way which thou camest." With what a tone of superiority and disdain does the Lord speak even to those of his enemies who appear most formidable ! The very tone in which he threatens them is calculated to restore to us our confidence, and to make us regard them in their proper place, which is that of poor worms of the earth which he is able to destroy by the breath of his mouth. The Lord repels the threats of Sennacherib with such a tone of authority, as to make us at once feel that with him to speak and to act are one and the same thing. We see that he makes no account of that numerous army, which Sennacherib had brought against Jerusalem, and in which he gloried, saying, " With the sole of my foot I have dried up all the rivers of besieged places." We feel that he who speaks here is that mighty one of whom it is said, " All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity. It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth and the inhabitants thereof are as grass-hoppers : that bringeth the princes to nothing ; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity." Isa. xl. 17, 22, 23. It would be well for us, when we are terrified by the threats of the wicked, to read those threats which the Lord denounces against them in the Scriptures, and to remember that while the threats of the wicked are often weak and powerless, those of the Almighty are like so many arrows shot by an uner-

ring hand, and which inevitably carry with them the vengeance of Him who hath said, that "He will repay his enemies to the face."

Let us see what are the means by which the Lord declares he will subdue Sennacherib. He tells him that he will lead him about like an intractable animal, putting "a hook in his nose and a bridle in his lips." The Lord must rule; all must obey him and do his will; and they who are not willing to be led by love, shall be driven by force. The soul that is intractable, and will not be drawn by "the bands of love and the cords of a man," must expect that the Lord will put a "hook in the nose, and a bridle in the lips." Ye then, to whom the Almighty addresses these gracious words, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls!" refuse not to take upon you the easy yoke of that Lord who will accomplish in you that which he commands, and teach you to do his will, conducting you by his Spirit in an even path. Remember that if you refuse the teaching of the Holy Spirit and the yoke of love, you have reason to expect that the Lord will teach you by the rod and by chastisement. "Be not," then, "as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding; whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle."

Let the consideration of this power of our God, who subdueth the most furious of his enemies by leading them where he pleaseth like muzzled animals, cheer and comfort us, when we meet with those whose rage and injuries, threats and execrations, make us tremble. Let us remember, that however violent and however numerous they may be, the Lord can lead them back like Sennacherib, by the way which they came; he puts "a bridle in the jaws of the people, causing them

to err." The bridle, the bit by which the Lord restrains the wicked, is sometimes an invisible power which he exercises over their minds, filling them with the terror of his name, so that "their heart melts" within them, "neither does there remain any more courage in any man;" sometimes a spirit of blindness with which he strikes them, so that they "grope for the wall like the blind;" and sometimes it is severe judgments, by which he gets the mastery over them, as he did in the case of Sennacherib, when he sent an angel which smote, in one night, in the camp of the Assyrians, an hundred fourscore and five thousand men.

Let us now consider the motives which the Lord assigns for defending Jerusalem and its inhabitants. The first is, that he was jealous of Jerusalem as of a virgin which had been espoused to him: "The virgin the daughter of Zion hath despised thee. The zeal\* of the Lord of Hosts shall do this." The Lord is frequently represented in the Old Testament as the husband of his people of whom he is said to be jealous. When his people are unfaithful, his jealousy leads him to punish them. Deut. xxix. 19, 20; xxxii. 16—21. When they are faithful, or when in their distress they repent and return unto their God, as their Husband who alone can protect them, then the jealousy of the Lord engages him to defend them, and to deliver them from their enemies. Ezek. xxxix. 24—26; Joel ii. 18—20; Zech. i. 14—17; viii. 1—3. Under the new covenant also, the Lord represents himself as the husband of his church. Ephes. v. 25—32; Matt. xxv. 1—10; John iii. 29. And believers are spoken of as being individually espoused unto the Lord at the period of their

\* *Jealousy* in the French version.

conversion, when they are united to him by faith. Thus Paul writes to the Corinthians, "I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." And the day when the Lord shall gather together all his elect, to introduce them into glory, is described as the day of "the marriage of the Lamb," (Rev. xix. 7, 9,) when the church appearing "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish," shall be like "a bride adorned for her husband." Rev. xxi. 9. If, by the grace of God, we can say with truth, that we are of the number of those who by faith have given themselves up to Christ, and whom he has "betrothed in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies, and in faithfulness," what a consolation must it be to us to think that the Lord is jealous of our souls, and that he watches over and protects them with the same ardor of affection with which a husband defends his wife. The Holy Spirit teaches us that "jealousy is the rage of a man," and that therefore "he will not spare in the day of vengeance," Prov. vi. 34; that "love is strong as death, and jealousy cruel as the grave," Sol. Song, viii. 6.; that "the coals thereof are as coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame." How important then is it for us not to turn against ourselves by our unfaithfulness the burning jealousy of God! "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God," are the terms in which he addresses his people, when he would deter them from worshipping any creature in heaven or in earth. "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?" is the language of the apostle Paul to the Corinthians, when he would deter them from participating in the feasts which the Pagans made, when they sacrificed to their idols. Let us then be careful,

first to put away idolatry out of our hearts, and then to avoid all such communication with the world as would make it appear that we hold out the right hand of fellowship to those who live in the idolatry of the creature: "Come out from among them, and be ye separate saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you." If we be faithful to our God,—if at least we bewail the derelictions of duty into which we continually fall, we may, like a wife protected by a powerful and jealous husband, despise our enemies, and 'shake our head at them. Through him we may triumph over them in every thing, and say, "The zeal (jealousy) of the Lord of Hosts shall do this."

The second motive which the Almighty puts forward as leading him to deliver Jerusalem, is, that he had himself founded that city, and that it belonged to him. "Hast thou not heard how that a long time ago I made this city, and that in ancient times I formed it. Would I have now brought it to the verge of desolation, and the fenced cities to heaps of ruins?"\*

How consoling is this language of God, when we consider that it is applied in the Scriptures to each individual believer. "The righteous is an everlasting foundation. The foundation of God standeth sure. The work of our Rock is perfect. He reviveth his work in the midst of the years," Hab. iii. 2; and when he has "begun a good work in us, he performs it until the day of Jesus Christ." When Satan assaults with rage those whom the Lord hath formed for himself to shew forth

\* It is so in the French version. "N'as tu pas appris qu'il y a long temps que j'ai fait cette ville, et qu'anciennement je l'ai aussi formée. L'aurais-je maintenant amenée au point d'être reduite en desolation, et les villes munies en monceaux de ruines?"

his praises, the Lord, as it were, answers him in these words: "Hast thou not known how that a long-time ago I formed them for my glory?" wilt thou snatch from me those whom I have chosen from the foundation of the world, those for whom I have given my Son, and whom I have built up by faith upon that sure foundation? Shall I let thee have it in thy power to say, I have destroyed the work of God? Have I taken such care of that soul till now, have I done so much to build it up and establish it in Christ, only that it may after all be reduced by thee, "into desolation and a heap of ruins?"

To enjoy the full consolation which flows from the promise of God that he will not "forsake the work of his hands," how necessary is it for us to be assured, that that which is wrought in us is really the work of God, and not a reformation effected merely by the influence of human motives! How necessary is it for us to be assured, that every stone of the building, from first to last, has been laid upon Christ by the hand of the Spirit of God, and that we are "built up in our most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost!" Jude 20. If this be the case, we shall find strong consolation in being able to say, "The Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves." Ps. c. 3. "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever; forsake not the work of thine own hands." Ps. cxxxviii. 8.

Before he declares his determination to reduce Sennacherib to his power like a ferocious animal, and to deliver Jerusalem, the Lord anticipates an objection which the Assyrian king might draw from the weakness of the people of God, and from their want of courage; he tells him that this very feebleness, which the enemy made a ground of triumph and reproach, would only serve to display more conspicuously the

power of God which should be perfected in their weakness. "Their inhabitants," he says, speaking of the cities of Judah, "were of small power, they were dismayed and confounded : they were as the grass of the field and as the green herb, as the grass of the house-tops, and as corn blasted before it has grown up." The Lord does not hesitate to acknowledge the weakness of his people ; he even frequently takes notice of it in his word, because the weakness enhances the triumph of his grace and power. Let us, then, learn willingly to "glory in our infirmity." When the enemy would terrify us by the view of our own worthlessness and vileness, let us learn to say to him, It is true, I am without strength or courage ; I am like the weakest and most contemptible of creatures ; I am as the grass of the field that is withered, or as the corn blasted before it is grown up ; but I have a strength independent of myself : "God is my strength and power ;" and my consolation is, that he has no need of my strength to assist his, and that the more weak and miserable I am, the more will he be exalted in having mercy on me.

#### GOD'S PROMISES TO HEZEKIAH.

After declaring his purpose to deliver Hezekiah out of the hands of Sennacherib, the Lord gives him two promises calculated to remove all his anxieties as to the consequences of the war ; the one assuring him of abundance, the other of the increase and prosperity of his people.

Hezekiah might have said within himself, What advantage is it to me to be delivered from a war, if I am to perish by famine ? Our land has been ravaged, and there is no time to till it ; how then are we to live



this year, and with what shall we sow the ground next year? The Lord answers all these fears, telling him, "Ye shall eat this year such things as grow of themselves, and in the second year that which springeth of the same, and in the third year sow ye and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruits thereof." From this let us learn, that there is no evil so great that the Lord cannot find a remedy for it. Though the Lord usually acts by means, yet if means be wanting, he can supply their place by the powerful operation of miraculous intervention. If we have little, he can multiply that little like the oil of the poor widow; so that we shall experience the truth of the declaration: "Better is a little with righteousness, than great revenues without right." Let us beware of a wicked distrust, like that of the captain of king Jehoram, who, when Elisha predicted to the city of Samaria, desolated at the time by famine, that there should be abundance on the following day, gainsayed the promise of God, saying with incredulity, "If the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" In this case, as in all others, the unbelief of man did not make of none effect the faithfulness of God, nor did it arrest the course of his blessings, except with reference to him who believed not the word of the Lord which was accomplished in due time. "Behold," answered the prophet, "thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not eat thereof." Let us beware, "lest any of us fall after the same example of unbelief." Let us take care that we say not, Of what advantage are promises of deliverance? I am in too great difficulties; my situation is too desperate: my body is too much worn out; there are too many things in me and mine to be changed; my heart is too bad to expect any cure, any relief, any deliverance. No,

my brethren, nothing is in too desperate a state for Him who hath promised and is faithful. "He is the repairer of breaches, the restorer of paths to dwell in. He changeth times and seasons; he healeth all our infirmities," both of soul and body. Wheresoever he passes in his love, he leaves behind him a blessing, "even a meat-offering and a drink-offering unto the Lord our God." Joel ii. 14. "His paths drop fatness; they drop upon the pastures of the wilderness," Ps. lxxv. 12, 13; so that the wilderness and the solitary place are glad; and the desert rejoices and blossoms as a rose." Isa. xxxv. 1, 2. "Strengthen then the weak hands, ye trembling believers, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; behold your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you." Isa. xxxv. 3, 4. Doubting souls! remember that if the promises of God be not fulfilled to you, and if you remain in the mire of distress and in temporal or spiritual difficulties, your unbelief alone is the cause of it. "Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God." Intreat the Lord to take away, out of your heart, that unbelief which asks, "How can these things be?" for the Lord answers you, "If it be marvellous in your eyes, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the Lord of Hosts."

The second promise which the Lord makes to Hezekiah, in order to remove his apprehensions respecting the consequences of the war, assures him of the increase and prosperity of the remnant of his people which escaped the ravages of Sennacherib's army: "The remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall yet again take root downward, and bear fruit upward; for out of Jerusalem shall go forth a rem-

nant, and they that escape out of mount Zion ; the zeal of the Lord of Hosts shall do this." This prediction evidently applies in a spiritual sense to the church of Christ, which the Holy Spirit calls the Jerusalem which is above, and which is the mother of all believers. After times of persecution, or of lukewarmness, ignorance, and darkness, there will always be found some that have escaped, a little remnant of real believers, to commence a new, a living, and a numerous people. By the blessing of the Most High, "the little one becomes a thousand, and she that halted a remnant, and she that was cast out a strong nation," Micah iv. 7 ; and in spite of all opposition, "when the time of the promise" draws nigh, the people grow and multiply exceedingly.

The promise of God to Hezekiah may also be applied, in a spiritual sense, to believers who come out of some state of langour and lukewarmness into which they may have fallen, and in which, to all appearance, there has scarcely a little remnant of faith and of the knowledge of God escaped. This little remnant, which is the incorruptible seed whereby the soul is regenerated, being watered by the dew of divine grace which is promised in answer to prayer, shall "take root downward, and bear fruit upward."

When the Lord pours water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground, he makes his people "spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses." Isaiah xlv. 3, 4. The important thing is to have, in the heart, some deep root of grace, some one of those undecaying roots "which shoot forth in the garden, and are wrapped about the heap." The seed which withers away and dies, when the burning sun of tribulation and persecution arises on it, is that, we are told, "which has no root." Let us labour, then, above all things, that we may be rooted and

grounded in Christ, and established in the faith. When once a soul is really planted in Christ by the hand of our Heavenly Father, the storm may break off its branches, and the drought may cause its leaves to fall, but there shall always be a rod that shall come out of its stem, and a branch that shall grow out of its root, so that we may apply to it the words of the patriarch: "There is hope of a tree if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease; though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground, yet through the scent of water it shall bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant." Job xiv. 7, 8. "As a teil tree and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves," so, saith Isaiah, speaking of the remnant of God's people, "the holy seed shall be the substance thereof." Isa. vi. 13.

THE EXECUTION OF THE LORD'S THREATS AGAINST  
SENNACHERIB.

The threats which the Almighty denounced against Sennacherib are soon put into execution; the Lord sends forth an angel and slays an hundred fourscore and five thousand men in the camp of the Assyrians, "and when they arose early in the morning, they were all dead corpses." The only observation we shall make on the means which God employed to destroy the army of Sennacherib, is, that it should give us consolation to reflect that we are continually surrounded by these powerful and invisible beings whom the Scripture calls angels, and whose instrumentality, it tells us, the Lord makes use of to preserve us from our enemies. If we stand in need of protectors, certainly we are not without them; we have those "angels that excel in strength; those chariots of God that are twenty

thousand; even thousands of angels." Ps. lxviii. 17. We have those angels which came to meet Jacob in great multitudes, when he was about to encounter his brother Esau, and of which he said, "This is God's host, and he called the name of that place Mahanaim." Gen. xxxii. 1, 2. We have those angels which "encamp round about those that fear the Lord, and deliver them." Ps. xxxiv. 8. We have those angels which behold the face of our Father in heaven, and watch over those little ones which believe in Christ. Matt. xviii. 6, 10. In a word, we know that the angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister unto those who shall be heirs of salvation." Heb. i. 14. The instruction to be derived from this doctrine in strengthening us against the fear of man, is set forth in a simple and striking manner in the conversation between Elisha and his servant. "Alas! my master, how shall we do," cries the servant of the man of God, when rising up early in the morning, and going forth, he sees an host encompassing the city with horses and chariots which had been sent by the king of Syria to seize Elisha. The prophet, whose eyes the Lord had opened to see what the eyes of his servant saw not, answers him, "Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." 2 Kings vi. 15—17. May the Lord open our eyes also, that seeing by faith those things which are invisible, we may be cheered by the consideration that "they that are with us, are more than they that are against us."

We may also remark, that Sennacherib was punished in that very thing which had been the

occasion of his sin. He had boasted of the "multitude of his chariots," and of the number of his troops, the sole of whose feet was sufficient to "dry up the rivers of besieged places." But God humbled him, by destroying, in one night, that mighty army of which he had been so vain. Thus God deals also with his children, when they indulge a spirit of vain-glory. When David, out of vanity, caused the people of Israel to be numbered, God punished him by sending a mortality among them, and thus making a numbering of death where David had made a numbering of pride. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." Jer. ix. 23, 24.

When, after his defeat, 'Sennacherib returned to Nineveh, the capital of his kingdom, it came to pass, "as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with a sword." Those who will not receive instruction from the first chastisements of God, must expect to receive others still more severe. The sinner must humble himself in heart, or he shall fall under the weight of the Almighty's wrath. "He, that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Prov. xxix. 1. Sennacherib, instead of humbling himself before God who had smitten him with the rod of his displeasure, refused to receive instruction from the chastisement. He continued to bow before his idols, and to "worship the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for evermore;" and thus hardening his

impenitent heart, he "treasured up for himself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." There is another lesson which we may derive from this circumstance. As Sennacherib had revolted against Him who is the Father and Sovereign Benefactor of all, Him in whom "we live, and move, and have our being," the Lord repays him according to his own doings, and allows him to fall by the hands of his own sons. Children of God! receive the instruction which the Lord here gives you. Would you be chastised by your own offspring, like Eli, David, and Isaac? Indulge, like them, a culpable weakness towards your favourite children, or in the bosom of your families depart in some things from the straight path of God's commandments, and most assuredly as you treat God, so by a just retribution shall you be treated by your children. Would you have obedient children? then first submit yourselves to your Heavenly Father, and be obedient to Him. "Prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only; and he will deliver you." Without this all your efforts will be vain; for He alone can incline the heart as he will, and unless his blessing be with you, you will find, in your children, nothing but uncircumcised ears and rebellious hearts. They will render double into your bosom the recompense of your rebellion against God, and he will execute against you that denunciation of the prophet, "Seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children." Hos. iv. 6.

The history which we have been considering appears to verify, in a striking manner, some important declarations of the Word of God. The melancholy end of Sennacherib seems to speak to us in the language of the prophet, "Who can stand before the indig-

nation of the Lord? who can abide the fierceness of his anger? What do we imagine against him? he will make an utter end." Nah. i. 6, 9. The deliverance of Jerusalem from a powerful army, by the hand of God, proves the efficacy of that promise which is made to the heavenly Zion, where the Most High dwelleth: "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early." With regard to Hezekiah, it verifies, in a most striking manner, that passage in Ecclesiastes, which seems as if it had been expressly penned for him: "This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me: there was a little city and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city."

May the Lord grant, that whenever Satan assails us with his temptations, this poor wise man may be found within us to deliver the city! May we ever be that poor man, "poor in spirit, humbled before our God, and made wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus;" that man who is strong because he feels himself weak, and who is "more than conqueror through him that loved him;" that by happy experience we may be able to say, with the preacher, "Wisdom is better than strength."



## MEDITATION V.

### HEZEKIAH'S SICKNESS.

“ In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live. Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the Lord, saying, I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore. And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the Lord. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs. And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered. And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of the Lord the third day? And Isaiah said, This sign shalt thou have of the Lord, that the Lord will do the thing that he hath spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees? And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees. And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the Lord: and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahas.” 2 KINGS, xx. 1—11.

FROM the sixth verse of this chapter, in which the Lord promises to deliver Hezekiah out of the hand of the king of Assyria, it would appear, that his sickness took place at a time when he had still something to apprehend from Sennacherib. It is generally thought

to have happened between the period when the king of Assyria retired from before Jerusalem, in consequence of the intelligence which he received relative to Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia, and the period when he returned to meet his doom.

Whether this opinion be correct or not, we see here the accomplishment of those declarations of the word of God, which tells us, that "man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward," Job v. 7.; that he "is of few days, and full of trouble," Job. xiv. 1; that "many are the afflictions of the righteous," Ps. xxxiv. 19; and that it is "through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom of God." Acts xiv. 22. Hezekiah had no sooner obtained a little rest from his external enemies than he was attacked with a severe malady. Let us not imagine that while we are on earth, where there is, as it were, a time of warfare appointed to man, Job vii. 1, we may expect to enjoy a day of perfect repose. It is on the other side of the grave that there is "a rest prepared for the people of God." Here there is no rest but in hope—here it is needful for us to be in "heaviness through manifold temptations," which are the remedy of our various infirmities. It had been necessary for the faith of Hezekiah to be exercised by the invasion of the king of Assyria, it is necessary for that faith to be now exercised by the approach of death; after having been humbled by the first of these trials, he required to be again humbled by the second, that he might have no ground of glorying.

#### HEZEKIAH IS SICK UNTO DEATH.

"In those days," saith the word of God, "was Hezekiah sick unto death." When the Scripture calls Hezekiah's sickness a sickness unto death, it speaks

thus in reference to what must have happened according to the ordinary course of the disease ; for, in point of fact, he did not die of it. His malady, however, would have been mortal, had not God wrought a miracle to preserve his life. Let us learn from this, that what in the natural course of things would be fatal, is not so when the Lord appoints it otherwise. "The Lord killeth and maketh alive," and he frequently disconcerts all human calculations as to the chances of life and death. As he can make a disease, which at its commencement threatens no danger, terminate fatally, so he can also bring us up from the gates of the grave notwithstanding a malady apparently the most fatal, and restore us to life, if life be necessary for us, to carry on our sanctification, and to work for his glory. Let us therefore, on the one hand, be always ready, and, on the other, let us remember that it is in the power of the Lord to prolong our days as long as we have need of it. Let us also learn from this, that when we expose ourselves to dangers for the cause of the Lord, he can preserve our life in spite of the threats and wrath of our enemies. Let us never imagine that we are obliged to act with cowardice in order to save it. Our life is in the hands of the Lord, who numbers the hairs of our head, who keeps us as the apple of his eye, and without whose permission even a sparrow cannot fall to the ground, much less one of his own children. It is often true, even with regard to this world, that "he who loses his life finds it ;" that is, he who exposes it courageously for the Lord, is so protected by him, that that life which had been devoted to his service is preserved in the midst of all dangers. The apostle Paul was a striking example of this special protection of God over his people. As he tells us himself, he had been "in deaths oft, once was he stoned,

thrice he suffered shipwreck, a night and a day had he been in the deep ;" he had often been "in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by his own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." 2 Cor. xi. 25—27. And yet after a ministry of nearly thirty years, he could say to his disciple Timothy, "Thou hast fully known the persecutions and afflictions which came upon me ; but out of them all the Lord delivered me." 2 Tim. iii. 11. It deserves also to be remarked, how often the Pharisees endeavoured to lay hands on our Lord, and yet were not able, though there seemed to be nothing to hinder them, but, as the Scriptures tell us, "his hour was not yet come." In the Apocalypse also, we may observe, that the beast shall not prevail to overcome the witnesses and put them to death until they have finished their testimony. Rev. xi. 7. The servant of God, then, may go forward with courage, in the assurance that in spite of all the fury of his enemies, he shall have time to accomplish the work which his Master has assigned him in this world.

#### THE WARNING OF THE LORD TO HEZEKIAH.

The prophet Isaiah is sent to Hezekiah to tell him, "Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order ; for thou shalt die and not live." Though the Lord has admonished us in his word, with sufficient frequency, to keep ourselves always in readiness, since we know not the hour when he shall come ; yet as he knows with what difficulty this idea of the uncertainty of life takes the form of a reality in our minds, he is often pleased

to add to the warnings of his word, warnings of providence, which are so many voices whereby he says to each of us: "Thy time is short: set thine house in order, for thou must die and not live." Though he may not warn us by a prophet, he sometimes does so by certain inward feelings, which his Spirit excites in us. At times, those years which, seen in perspective, generally appear so long, suddenly contract themselves to our view, and are reduced to the measure of a "hand-breadth;" so that the time of our life is as nothing before us, and looking forward to the coming of the Son of man, we can say, "Behold he cometh in the clouds of heaven." At other times, God warns us by sudden and striking deaths; by the death of persons of our own age, or by the death of those who were united to us by the ties of blood, or of some of our intimate and familiar friends, with whom we took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company. Ps. lv. 14. Sometimes, also, God admonishes us by the decay and wasting away of our mortal body. When we see it growing weak, and withering like a field in the heat of summer; when we feel disease slowly undermining our constitution, and at intervals bringing on attacks, which successively take away a portion of strength that never returns: this is a voice which says to us, "Set thy house in order, for thou shalt die and not live."

"Set thy house in order." These words admonished Hezekiah to regulate every thing connected with his temporal affairs, and the succession of the kingdom. Let us learn from this, that it is the duty of a child of God to regulate his worldly concerns in such a manner, that when he dies he may leave no cause of embarrassment, blame, or scandal, to those who survive him. When our affairs are in an unsettled and disorderly

state, we can neither live nor die in peace ; the word is choked and stifled by thorns ; and the "cares of this world" render it "unfruitful." Many words would be superfluous on this subject : here experience speaks louder than words. We never see the Christian, whose temporal affairs are embarrassed, and who allows them to remain in such a state, a lively, happy, zealous Christian, desiring to depart. On the contrary, it is among such Christians that we find suffering souls, discontented with themselves, with events, and with others. "He that hath ears to hear let him hear."

#### HEZEKIAH'S CONDUCT WHEN THE PROPHET ADMONISHED HIM OF HIS APPROACHING END.

Hezekiah had no sooner heard the word of warning than "he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the Lord." Here we still see Hezekiah calling upon God in every circumstance of difficulty, and thus shewing us that one of the happy effects of trials upon the believer is to send him to prayer. We are by nature so ungrateful, that prosperity, which ought to draw us nearer to God, often estranges us from him, and we have need of afflictions to lay us at his feet again.

"Hezekiah turned his face to the wall." This he did, doubtless, to have his mind more collected by avoiding the distraction which the view of surrounding objects might occasion to him. When we pray, let us seek to have our minds collected ; let us "enter into our closet," or let us go into some "place apart," as our Lord was wont to do ; but above all, let us withdraw our hearts afar from vain thoughts and tumult of the world within us, which too often follows us in our retirement. It is especially in sickness that God summons us to reflection ; it is then especially that we

must avoid hearing and seeing persons and things that would distract us ; that we must turn our eyes to the wall, and close them upon the vanities of earth, and place ourselves before our God, to whom perhaps we may soon be called to commit our soul. Hezekiah might have felt some difficulty in disengaging himself from the vain attractions of those about him, and he turned his face to the wall to create a solitude for himself in the midst of his court and of his palace ; thus intimating to his attendants that he wished to be alone and to meditate. Let us, like him, find moments of meditation and retirement for ourselves in every situation. Let us have the courage to disengage ourselves with meekness, but at the same time with firmness, from the importunate earnestness of those who, from an ill-directed affection, dissipate our time and our thoughts by the anxious interest which they take in the care of our body. Let us, if possible, turn to the wall, and thus fearlessly shew that we feel the want of being alone, of reflecting with ourselves, and of turning our back upon the bustle of the world which for us is passing away.

GENERAL REFLECTIONS WHICH HEZEKIAH'S SICKNESS  
AFFORDS US.

The sickness of Hezekiah, considered now under a general point of view, will furnish us with two kinds of instruction : the one relative to the body, the other relative to the soul. We shall consider these in order.

1.—HEZEKIAH'S SICKNESS CONSIDERED IN CONNECTION  
WITH HIS BODY.

Let us here take for granted, what cannot be denied, that Hezekiah sought from God a prolongation of life,

We cannot doubt this when we read in the 5th verse, that God sent Isaiah to the king with the following message: "Turn again and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee; on the third day thou shalt go up to the house of the Lord." The first thing which strikes us here is, that Hezekiah, desiring to live, goes straight to God to obtain this blessing, being persuaded that he who pronounced the sentence of death, could alone revoke it, and that without a benediction from on high all human succour would be useless. What conclusion are we to draw from this? Is it that we are to employ no remedies in our sickness? By no means. The very history upon which we are meditating is a proof of the contrary, since Isaiah, after having promised him a prolongation of days from the Lord, added, "Let them take a lump of figs and lay it for a plaister upon the boil, and he shall recover." Isa. xxxviii. 21. But though we ought not to exclude the use of remedies, it is also certain that the Christian, when tried by sickness, ought to employ prayer as the most effectual remedy, and as that from which all others derive their efficacy. "Is any among you afflicted, let him pray. Is any sick among you, let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." James v. 13—16. This passage evidently recommends the offering up of prayer on behalf of the sick by the elders of the church and



other Christians, as the most effectual means for their recovery. There is another reflection which this passage suggests to us, namely, that as it appears from many parts of Scripture (2 Chron. xxi. 18—19; Job xxxiii. 14—30; Ps. cvii. 17—22; 1 Cor. v. 5; xii. 30, 32; Rev. ii. 20—23,) that sickness is often sent as a punishment for some particular sins, confession of sin, with a sincere desire to forsake it, is an indispensable condition of prayer being heard, when offered on behalf of the sick. Thus, Job speaking of the healing of a sick person chastised for his iniquities, supposes him to be admonished by a messenger of the Lord who shews him his duty, that he may take warning and confess his sins, saying, “I have sinned and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not;” and that the Lord then says, “Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom;” and it is then “his flesh becomes fresher than a child, and he returns to the days of his youth.” Job xxxiii. 23—27. This passage forcibly reminds us of the exhortation of the apostle James, “To confess our sins one to another,” before we “pray for one another that we may be healed.” When, then, a child of God who is in sickness has his mind charged with some particular sin, and his conscience troubled, he cannot expect relief from prayer, until he has unburdened his soul by a free and unreserved confession—a confession which even of itself may give relief to the body, by delivering the mind from a weight and from an inward anxiety extremely injurious to the health.

Let us now examine and see, whether in our sickness we really regard prayer as our first remedy, and the Lord as our first physician. Are we of the same mind as the friends of Peter’s mother-in-law, who, when they saw her “sick of a fever,” immediately

“went to Jesus, and besought him for her?” Do we really regard remedies only as means which the Lord may bless or not, as he pleases? Do we make their efficacy depend entirely on his blessing? My brethren, are you never found to boast of remedies as infallible, and to speak of them with a tone which plainly indicates that it is in them you place your confidence? Are not the names of remedies and of physicians more frequently in your mouth, on occasions of sickness, than the name of the Lord, who alone can heal all your infirmities? and when we endeavor to draw your attention to the Lord, is it not such expressions as this that we hear from your lips: “We know indeed that he is the Great Physician; that he alone can do all things; it is very true, we ought to trust in him.” Cold phrases, frigid confessions, which come mechanically into the mouth, while the actions shew that the heart is far from depending, above all things, in the Lord. Are you never seen to heap remedy on remedy destroying thus your constitution, and running the risk of taking things which may be injurious not only to the health of the body, but even to the faculties of the mind? What! the most skilful physicians themselves, from their experience, recommend you to make use of but little medicine, and you are not taught by the wisdom of God what the world has taught them! Where then is your faith? Is it not the fear of death, a want of confidence in God, and a carnal impatience which cannot await the time appointed by the Lord for your deliverance; is it not these deplorable spiritual infirmities that make you multiply remedies in a manner painful to those who witness it? If, notwithstanding the multiplying of remedies, you are not cured, or if you are obliged continually to go through the same round of sicknesses and of cures, are you not

really chargeable with the blame of it yourselves? The Lord deals with you according to your unbelief as he would have dealt with you according to your faith, had you trusted in him; and he applies to you the words of the prophet, "In vain shalt thou use many medicines: for thou shalt not be cured." Jer. xlv. 11.

The children of God have three great means of preserving health, which cannot be too much recommended to them. The first is sobriety, so frequently inculcated in the word of God. How many are there who, without suspecting it, as the Sacred Scripture saith, "put a knife to their throat, because they are given to appetite." Prov. xxiii. 2. The second is the fear of the Lord, which has the promise of "length of days, long life, and peace;" and is "health to the navel and marrow to the bones." Prov. iii. 2, 8. Let there be more uprightness, more inward peace, more meekness, more kindness, and there will be less frequent occasion to have recourse to remedies intended to calm the blood, and to cleanse the body from its impurities. "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit drieth up the bones." Prov. xvii. 22. And besides, where there is more holiness there will be less need of chastisement, and the words of the book of Exodus will be realized, "Ye shall serve the Lord your God, and I will take away sickness from the midst of thee." Exod. xxiii. 25. The last remedy is prayer, which has annexed to it the promise of healing, to which I have already directed your attention. With these three means of health, we find persons of feeble constitutions almost supernaturally supported, sometimes in the absence of all kinds of human remedies.

We would by no means, however, recommend the people of God to reject altogether the use of medicine,

We have already seen that the word of God authorises us to employ them. What we have been combating is the too great confidence which is often placed in those means, and the abuse which is made of them. We admit that, in general, God works by means which he blesses according to his will, as he blessed a plaster of dried figs to the healing of Hezekiah's boil. The Lord, however, can dispense with means, and he does so, when he sees fit; though generally he makes use of them for the accomplishment of his purposes. Hence he is called "the Lord, wonderful in counsel, excellent in working." Is. xxviii. 29. And we see that when he promised Paul, that none of those that were with him in the ship should perish, the apostle did not imagine that this promise precluded the necessity of using means; for he said to the centurion and to the soldiers, in order to make them keep the sailors in the vessel, "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved." Acts xxvii. 22, 31. We must therefore beware lest, in avoiding the snare of placing confidence in remedies, we fall into that of tempting God by refusing to employ any human means whatsoever for our recovery.

We shall conclude our observations upon this subject with one general remark, namely, that here, as in all other cases, the Christian must "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto him." Sickness comes not from God without some object: "He chastens us for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness." If, then, we be led by the Spirit of God, we will not wish for the restoration of health without desiring above all that the sickness may have the sanctifying effect for which it was sent to us. To wish for our recovery in any other spirit, would be to go against the intention of God and our own interest; and our

heavenly Father would be too wise to hear us. Be assured, therefore, that all your remedies, all your anxious desires to recover, will be of no avail, until you have taken away out of your hearts or out of your families those things which are displeasing to the Lord, and for which he afflicts you. Be assured even that this excessive desire of health is a proof that health is not good for you ; for if you felt a supreme desire to glorify the Lord, you would be content to glorify him in sickness as well as in health, when he calls you to it ; and it is very doubtful whether the man who does not bear sickness well, would bear health well, and make a proper use of it.

**2.—HEZEKIAH'S SICKNESS CONSIDERED IN CONNECTION WITH  
HIS SOUL.**

We now proceed to consider Hezekiah's state, as it regards his soul, during the period of his sickness ; and, in the first place, we see that in his prayer he reminds God of his integrity, which he speaks of as a ground of consolation and a motive of confidence : " I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight." Let us not suppose, that Hezekiah wanted here to boast of his works, and to depend upon his own righteousness. In the account which is given of his character, it is said of him, that " he trusted in the Lord God of Israel ;" and in the prayer which he made after his sickness, he ascribes his deliverance to the Lord's having " cast all his sins behind his back." Isa. xxxviii. 17. But it is one thing to depend upon our works, and quite another to be able to testify of ourselves that we are upright in heart ; the former is self-righteousness which God

detests, the latter is the duty and happiness of the believer who has received of his God the precious gift of uprightness. It is a great consolation in times of trial, when we have special need to approach God, to be able, even while humbling ourselves in the dust on account of our sins, to call him to witness that we have walked before him in sincerity and truth. "Our rejoicing," said St. Paul, in the midst of his afflictions, "is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward." 2 Cor. i. 12. When we are Christians, not "in word, and in tongue, but in deed and in truth," it is by this "we know that we are of the truth, and we assure our hearts before him." 1 John iii. 18, 19. When we walk before God in sincerity and uprightness, we have a liberty, a confidence of inestimable price in approaching him in time of need. We then feel assured of that protection which he has promised to the upright of heart. In fact, he acts towards us in our afflictions, as we have acted towards him in our prosperity. This was the experience of David, when he said, "He brought me forth also into a large place: he delivered me, because he delighted in me. The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness: according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his judgments were before me: and as for his statutes, I did not depart from them. I was also upright before him, and have kept myself from mine iniquity. Therefore the Lord hath recompensed me according to my righteousness; according to my cleanness in his eye-sight. With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful, and with the upright man

thou wilt shew thyself upright. With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure ; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself unsavoury. And the afflicted people thou wilt save : but thine eyes are upon the haughty, that thou mayest bring them down." 2 Sam. xxii. 20—28. You will observe that in the latter part of this passage, David, far from glorying in his uprightness, declares, that God humbles the proud, and saves only those who are "afflicted," that is, through a sense of their sins.

What a misery it is not to feel at peace with our God in the time of our affliction, when we have a special need of his assistance ! When we have not walked before God like Hezekiah, "in truth and with a perfect heart ;" when we have not acquired a habit of thinking, speaking, acting, as continually in his presence ; when there is something on our conscience which burdens it ; when there is, as it were, an unsettled account between God and us, at such a time we cannot approach him with freedom. If we pray, our prayers return to us without a blessing ; the heavens are, as it were, brass over our heads, and the earth iron under our feet. We have, then, two trials at the same time, the one, that of being afflicted, the other, the much greater one, of not being able to meet God in our affliction. "The hypocrites in heart," saith Elihu, "heap up wrath ; they cry not when he bindeth them," Job xxxvi. 18 ; that is, when they are "holden in cords of affliction." In another place, Job expresses the same sentiment, when he says, "What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul ? Will God hear his cry when trouble cometh upon him ? Will he delight himself in the Almighty ? will he always call upon God ?" Job xxvii. 8—10. O, my brethren, I repeat it, what a misery it is to be unable to pray in adversity, or even to be

We cannot doubt this when we read in the 5th verse, that God sent Isaiah to the king with the following message: "Turn again and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee; on the third day thou shalt go up to the house of the Lord." The first thing which strikes us here is, that Hezekiah, desiring to live, goes straight to God to obtain this blessing, being persuaded that he who pronounced the sentence of death, could alone revoke it, and that without a benediction from on high all human succour would be useless. What conclusion are we to draw from this? Is it that we are to employ no remedies in our sickness? By no means. The very history upon which we are meditating is a proof of the contrary, since Isaiah, after having promised him a prolongation of days from the Lord, added, "Let them take a lump of figs and lay it for a plaister upon the boil, and he shall recover." Isa. xxxviii. 21. But though we ought not to exclude the use of remedies, it is also certain that the Christian, when tried by sickness, ought to employ prayer as the most effectual remedy, and as that from which all others derive their efficacy. "Is any among you afflicted, let him pray. Is any sick among you, let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." James v. 13—16. This passage evidently recommends the offering up of prayer on behalf of the sick by the elders of the church and



other Christians, as the most effectual means for their recovery. There is another reflection which this passage suggests to us, namely, that as it appears from many parts of Scripture (2 Chron. xxi. 13—19; Job xxxiii. 14—30; Ps. cvii. 17—22; 1 Cor. v. 5; xii. 30, 32; Rev. ii. 20—23,) that sickness is often sent as a punishment for some particular sins, confession of sin, with a sincere desire to forsake it, is an indispensable condition of prayer being heard, when offered on behalf of the sick. Thus, Job speaking of the healing of a sick person chastised for his iniquities, supposes him to be admonished by a messenger of the Lord who shews him his duty, that he may take warning and confess his sins, saying, “I have sinned and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not;” and that the Lord then says, “Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom;” and it is then “his flesh becomes fresher than a child, and he returns to the days of his youth.” Job xxxiii. 23—27. This passage forcibly reminds us of the exhortation of the apostle James, “To confess our sins one to another,” before we “pray for one another that we may be healed.” When, then, a child of God who is in sickness has his mind charged with some particular sin, and his conscience troubled, he cannot expect relief from prayer, until he has unburdened his soul by a free and unreserved confession—a confession which even of itself may give relief to the body, by delivering the mind from a weight and from an inward anxiety extremely injurious to the health.

Let us now examine and see, whether in our sickness we really regard prayer as our first remedy, and the Lord as our first physician. Are we of the same mind as the friends of Peter’s mother-in-law, who, when they saw her “sick of a fever,” immediately

ness before God—he trusts in the Lord—he courageously causes a religious reformation in his kingdom—he appears to have been habitually a man of prayer,—and yet when death approaches he is unwilling to depart. Abraham, after having believed unto justification,—after having shewed forth his faith by works, leaving, at the command of God, his country and his kindred and his father's house, and going out without knowing whither he went,—Abraham, the friend of God, twice seeks to save his life by disguising the truth and concealing that Sarah was his wife. He certainly had not, at that time, a desire to depart. The righteous Lot, who, “dwelling among the wicked, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds,” thanks God because he had saved him from the burning of Sodom, and says, “Thou hast magnified thy mercy which thou hast shewed unto me, in saving my life.” Yea, and fearing lest, ere he reached the mountain, he should be overtaken by the fire and brimstone which fell upon Sodom, he entreated God to spare the little city of Zoar, that he might retire thither. “Behold now this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live.” Assuredly Lot had not at that time a desire to depart. Often does David in the Psalms thank God for having brought him from the gates of the grave, and from the sorrows of death, Ps. xviii. 3—6; cxvi. 1—5; cxviii. 17, 18. Paul himself, who, in writing to the Philippians, evinced such an earnest desire to depart, seems not always to have experienced it. Surely he felt it not at Corinth, when the Lord saw it needful to encourage him against the fear he entertained lest his enemies should lay hands upon him. Acts xviii. 9, 10. Probably he had it not at the time which he refers to when he says to the

Corinthians, "When we were come unto Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears." 2 Cor. vii. 5, comp. 2 Cor. i. 8, 10. Epaphroditus does not appear to have had a desire to depart during his sickness, since the apostle, speaking of his recovery, says, "For indeed he was sick nigh unto death; but God had mercy upon him." Phil. ii. 27. All this, we repeat, is explained by that natural desire of life, which is a kind of instinct in all beings clothed with a body, and which can only be destroyed by a very lively faith and by very sanctified affections. The Lord himself seems, in a manner, to recognise as natural this desire of life, when in his commendation of the prayer of Solomon, who had only asked for wisdom, he says, "Neither hast thou asked for long life," intimating that such a desire would have been quite natural.

From the observations which we have just made, it follows, that there are two dangers against which we must be on our guard concerning this desire to depart; the first is, that of regarding the absence of it as an ordinary weakness, which affords no evil symptom, even when it is habitual; on the contrary, we are of opinion, that such a state is not that of an established Christian, and that we ought to be humbled on account of it, as proceeding from a weakness of faith, and a want of affection for things above. On the other hand, we should guard against desponding, because we do not habitually feel a desire to depart, as if it evinced an entire absence of faith. Surely to doubt that we are children of God is not the way to create in us this desire. Far from it; to be enabled to rejoice at the thought of death, we must be confirmed in the assurance of our salvation, by a simple faith in the promises made to those who look to Christ.

Then the heart, being established in grace, and having boldness to look steadfastly at death, will come, notwithstanding its infirmities and sins, to long for it, as the moment when "mortality shall be swallowed up of life." And thus being firmly fixed upon Christ, and having a solid point of support on which to rest its prayers, it will be able, in spite of its weakness, to wait upon the Lord, and to ask of him with assurance, spiritual affections, a lively faith, and an entire uprightness, from which will naturally spring up, as from its source, the desire to depart. For, after all, let us remember, that this desire, like every other grace, must come from God, and that the apostle, after having expressed how ardently he wished to be clothed upon with his house which is from heaven, adds, "Now he that hath wrought us for this self-same thing is God, who also hath given us the earnest of his Spirit." 2 Cor. v. 5. If the Lord gives us the earnest of his Spirit in the same measure as he gave it to St. Paul, we shall desire to depart in the same measure as he did. Let us ask, and we shall receive; for, says the same apostle, "He who establisheth us and hath anointed us is God, who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts."

Before we conclude what we have to say on this subject, we would remark, that there sometimes exists in believers, and much more in unconverted persons, a false desire to depart. There are persons who seem to desire death, but they wish for it only because they do not find their expectations from the world realized, and because they meet with trials, privations, and disappointments in it. Such was the case with Rebecca, when she said to Isaac, "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are

of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?" Gen. xxvi. 46. Such also was the case with Rachel, when, jealous of her sister Leah, and grieved on account of her own barrenness, she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die." Gen. xxx. 1. It was also a false desire to depart which Jonah felt, when "the sun beat upon his head that he fainted, and being angry because the gourd was withered, he said, It is better for me to die than to live." Jonah iv. 7, 8. Neither was it a pure desire to depart which Elijah felt when he sat under a juniper tree, and requested for himself that he might die; and said, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." 1 Kings xix. 4. The genuine desire to depart is that which Paul felt, and which comes from a wish to be with Christ. "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Phil. i. 21. It is the longing after the heavenly country which makes the believing soul say, in the language of Jacob to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country." Gen. xxx. 25. It is the desire which is preserved in the midst of a state, which the world would call happy, insomuch that even if we could say to him who feels it, as Pharaoh said unto Hadad, when he asked his dismissal, "What hast thou lacked with me, that, behold, thou seekest to go to thine own country," the believing soul could reply, like him, "Nothing; howbeit, let me go in anywise." 1 Kings xi. 22. When this desire is genuine, it makes us feel like the apostle, "in a strait betwixt two." Phil. i. 23, 25. We desire, indeed, to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. But if it appears necessary for the glory of God, or the good of others, we are willing to continue in the body, and can even desire to continue in it for the advancement of

those among whom the Lord sees fit to employ us. If we have the happiness of experiencing this desire to depart, we should not speak of it too much; above all, we should not boast of it, and we should never discourage those who do not yet feel it. It sometimes happens that those who, in health, appeared very strong in faith, become weak at the approach of death; while others, who mourned because they had not a desire to depart, obtain it when they come near to their latter end. In this case, as in every other, let no man glory, let none be discouraged, but let us all press on towards perfection.

#### THE PROMISE OF RECOVERY MADE TO HEZEKIAH.

The Lord, who "is nigh unto all them who call upon him in truth," immediately heard the prayer of Hezekiah. "It came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah, the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the Lord; and I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake."

The first thing which we notice in this answer of God to Hezekiah, is, that he represents himself to him as the God of David his father, and gives him to understand that he hears his prayer in consequence of his being a descendant of that "man after God's own heart;" which reminds us of the promise, that God shews mercy unto thousands of

them that love him and keep his commandments."

What a motive to induce fathers to serve with uprightness of heart that God whose "mercy is from everlasting to everlasting, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them." How sweet is it to think, that, in virtue of the promises of a faithful God, we may, by serving him uprightly, entail a succession of blessings upon our remotest posterity, and make him become the God of our children after us, as he has been our own.

Our second observation is, that the Lord promises Hezekiah that he will restore him to health after three days? Why not heal him immediately? Surely the Lord needed not those three days, any more than he needed the seven days of the creation to bring the universe into existence, or than he needs fifteen, twenty, or thirty years of life, to carry on the sanctification of one of his children. In all his operations, the Lord hath only to speak the word, and it is done. But, in general, it is not his will to act thus, as the ordinary course of his providence evinces. And why is it not his will? We might perhaps be able to point out some reasons for it; but for the present, all we want is to notice as a fact, that God's way in dealing with us is generally gradual and often slow. We will only draw from it this lesson, so often repeated in the word of truth, that if the Lord tarry we must wait for him—that we must never say in our haste, that he does not keep his promises, because he does not answer us immediately. We must often call to mind the exhortation of the Preacher, "I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God. Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth

him. Where the word of a king is, there is power; and who may say unto him, What doest thou?" Eccles. viii. 2, 4. We may perhaps also apply to that spirit of waiting and of patience which should characterise the believer, the words of Isalah, "He that believeth shall not make haste"—words which seem to be explained by the apostle's exhortation to imitate those who, "through faith and patience, inherit the promises," and by the example of Abraham, who, "after he had patiently endured, obtained the promises." Heb. vi. 12, 15.

Lastly, in the Lord's answer to Hezekiah, and in the words "on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the Lord," we see that the Lord, in restoring him his life, expected that he would employ it in serving Him, who had delivered him. Happy they to whom the Lord, who knows the heart, can bear witness beforehand, that the first use they will make of the health which he restores to them, will be to employ it in testifying their gratitude! Let us examine our heart, and ask ourselves, whether, when we have been sick, it was that we might labour in the service of the Lord, that we have prayed for health—whether, when we have recovered our strength, we have immediately employed it for his glory. Let us examine ourselves, whether it may not be because we have not a real desire to consecrate our strength to God, or because we have not consecrated it to him when for a time he has given it to us, that he either keeps us in a state of habitual weakness, or allows us to fall back into such a state. Surely it is better to be kept in humiliation and watchfulness, through bodily weakness, than to be strong and employ our strength in the service of sin, and in living without God in the world.



Not only does God promise to heal Hezekiah, but also in his goodness he grants his request to see the promise confirmed by a sign. When the Pharisees asked of our Lord a sign from heaven, he refused them their request, and treated them as "a wicked and adulterous generation." But when Hezekiah says to Isaiah, "What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall go up unto the house of the Lord on the third day?" the Lord, instead of a refusal and a rebuke, offers him his choice of two signs, either that the shadow of the sun should go forward, or retrograde ten degrees on the dial of Ahaz. Why this difference? Because God knows the heart, and he saw in the Pharisees a deep-rooted and scornful unbelief, which, unconvinced by miracles wrought on earth, in a kind of defiance, demanded a miracle in the heavens. The Lord looked upon the Pharisees with anger, being grieved at the hardness of their hearts; he felt that it would be useless to give any sign to persons who had shut their eyes against the light, and he refused it to them. But he saw in the demand of Hezekiah, merely a weakness of faith which he viewed with compassion, even as he looked with pity on the poor father who said unto him, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Believing, but weak souls ye who are afflicted because your faith is not strong, and who, like Hezekiah, require support of some sign to lean on, beware of allowing yourselves to sink into despondency, or of permitting Satan to discourage you by telling you that you are unbelievers, and that the promises being made only to those who doubt not, you have nothing to expect from the Saviour. Know that the Lord distinguishes between the weak and the double-minded; between him who mourns over his unbelief and condemns it, and him, who, having his

heart really divided, sometimes turns to the promises, sometimes abandons them and returns to the world and to his unbelief, and is wavering in the faith, only because his heart is wavering between God and the world. Remember that there is a total difference between the obstinate, perverse unbelief of a Pharisee, and the remains of unbelief which are still found in a heart really humbled and turned to God. Recollect that the Lord "knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are but dust," and that if he did not regard as real believers any but those who had a perfect faith without any degree of weakness, he would not have commanded us to "receive him that is weak in the faith," and to "support the weak." Shall he not himself do that which he enjoins upon us?

It is with diffidence, and leaving it to my readers to receive or to reject it, that I would venture to propose a spiritual interpretation of the offer made by God to Hezekiah, either to cause the shadow to go forward or to go back on the dial of Ahaz. May we not consider it as a representation of the two signs which the Lord gives us of his work in our heart; the one by a rapid progress in sanctification, the other by a lively feeling of our wretchedness which makes us go back in our opinion of ourselves, and in appearance retrograde instead advancing? When we have been lifted up by the gifts of God, or when, through pride or the efforts of the natural man, we bear fruits, fair indeed to outward appearance, but inwardly unsound, is it not a sign of God's love towards us when he prunes his vine; when he "lops the bough with terror, and the high ones of stature are hewn down, and the haughty are humbled." Isa. x. 33.

## APPLICATION.

We are all sick, like Hezekiah, even unto death: our malady is the sentence pronounced against our first parent and against his posterity, "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return." We have all a sentence of death against us: for "it is appointed unto man once to die." Heb. ix. 27. We are all like criminals shut up in the same prison-house, waiting the execution of the sentence. He who is commissioned to execute the sentence summons them in their turn to submit to their lot, according as he pleases; so that no calculation can enable them to say with any degree of certainty, that one shall be called to-day rather than another. It is in this condition the word of God regards us when it says to us, "Be ye always ready: watch, for ye know not the day nor the hour. Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning. The time is short. The Lord is at hand. The judge is at the door. Set thy house in order, for thou shalt die and not live."

"Thou shalt die and not live." Ponder these words. Yes, ponder them, and apply them to yourselves. That word *die*—how lightly do we pronounce it! With how little reflection do we say, "If I should die"—"when I die"—"after my death." How lightly do we speak of the death of others! we say of a person, "Do you know that he is dead?" with the same tone that we speak of some common piece of news, the rumour of the day, which excites a momentary curiosity; and if we speak of the consequences of his death, it is only with reference to those which it has in connection with this world and with the survivors. Ah, how does this levity sadden the serious minded man, who, when he hears these words, "he is dead,"

asks himself, "and his soul, where is it gone?" Know, unreflecting men, who attach so little importance to this word death, when you apply it to a fellow-man, provided indeed it does not affect you; know that to him who is departed, "death" is every thing; time ended—judgment passed—eternity begun; the gravest, the most solemn thing that can be conceived. One day it will be so to you also, and you will know what these serious words imply, "Thou shalt die and not live." Then you also shall have a bed of death, a shroud, a coffin, a tomb, a day of burial, when the mourners shall follow you in silence to your long home, and you shall be slowly let down into the ground, and the hollow sound of the clay falling heavily upon the coffin-lid to cover it, shall be heard. Hear you that sound? understand you all its solemn meaning? It tells you, that for the child of Adam whom the earth covers, "there shall be time no longer." It tells you, that for him the world with its lusts has passed away. It is, as it were, an eternal adieu to all that the world contains—to all that he has seen, and loved, and sought after, and possessed therein. When this mournful ceremony shall have been performed for you, others shall continue to live upon the earth as before; they shall buy and sell, and plant and build. Soon your houses shall be inhabited by others; others shall wear your clothes—they shall search the most secret recesses of your closet, where you were wont to shut yourself up in private; they shall succeed you in all your occupations, and in a short time it shall not be perceived that you have left a vacant place in the world. The sun, as usual, shall know the place of his rising and the place of his setting; the seasons shall succeed one another in due order; the spring shall bring back its flowers, the summer its heat, the autumn its fruits, the

winter its retirement and repose. But for you no more flowers of spring, no more shades of summer, no more fruits of autumn, no more tranquil scenes of winter around the domestic fireside. For you nothing but God, judgment, and eternity; an eternity either of happiness or of misery! Oh! I beseech you, consider all that these words, so important and so solemn, contain—"Thou shalt die, and not live." Consider that they may be put into execution against you at any moment, and that this night your soul may be required of you.

Hear, then, the voice of the Holy Spirit, which saith unto you, "Set thy house in order." And, first, if there be any among you whose temporal affairs are not well regulated, I repeat it, set them in order without delay, or you cannot die in peace, being in this respect out of the path of the commandments of that God who will bring every "work into judgment." If your affairs be well regulated, still I say to you, "set thy house in order," as one who is about to die. Make them as little complicated as possible; act like a man who intends to retire from business with a view to returning into his own country, and seeks gradually to disengage himself from his connexions. Buy and sell if it be necessary, but ever remember the words, "Let them that buy be as though they possessed not." Marry, if the Lord call you to that state; but remember the exhortation, that "they that have wives be as though they had none." Enjoy the things of this world which God has given you, and from which you may without sin derive some pleasure; but forget not the words, "Let those that use the world be as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away." 1 Cor. vii. 29—31. Form not distant projects—let not your thoughts be too much carried into the future

of this world ; be not like those who say, " To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain." James iv. 13. Often say to yourselves, to check yourselves when your temporal prospects open out in the distance before you, " Thou shalt die and not live."

But there is another house to be set in order, as if we were always on the verge of death. That house is our soul, which is the building of God—"a spiritual house," as it is called by the Holy Spirit, 1 Pet. ii. 5. This house we must examine, that at the day of trial it may be found built upon the rock, and may stand firm and unshaken. Now you know that "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Christ Jesus." 1 Cor. iii. 11. This is the foundation-stone, elect and precious, upon which whosoever buildeth shall not be confounded. 1 Pet. ii. 6. Examine then, seriously, what is the foundation of all your hopes. Is it Christ alone, and his perfect righteousness ? Does your whole heart repose upon him ? Do you rest on nothing which you have done, or which you ever hope to do ? If you strive after sanctification, is it that you may "build yourself up in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost ?" Do you place merit neither in your prayers, nor in your repentance, nor in your faith, nor in your works ? Do you aim at sanctification from love to him who has already saved you, and not from fear, or with a view to meriting, by a certain measure of holiness, a participation in the merits of Christ ? In a word, standing as it were in the presence of death and judgment, and leaning upon your house, to ascertain if it stands firm, see if it abides the trial of this warning, brought powerfully home to your heart by the Holy Spirit, "set thy house in order, for thou must die and not live."

But further ; if you tell me that your hope is well grounded, that, according to the Word, you are sure that you are "the house of God," because you "hold fast your confidence and rejoicing of hope," I would say to you, This is well, but I would add, Examine now if that confidence be a living principle within you, and if your "faith worketh by love." When a house is really founded upon Christ, Christ dwells in that house : Christ, it is said, "dwells in our hearts by faith," Eph. iii. 17 ; and when Christ dwells in a house, "he cleanseth it from all filthiness and from all idols." Ezek. xxxvi. 25. He who dwelleth in Christ and Christ in him, "beareth much fruit ;" and whosoever "hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure." Let us examine ourselves in this respect ; let us not rest in a dry and lifeless assurance of salvation, founded on some theological system by which we would endeavor to persuade ourselves that we are saved, and not on "a demonstration of the Spirit and of power." While it is true that we must not build our house upon the foundation of works, it is equally true that the house founded upon Christ is a temple in which the Spirit of Christ teaches, exhorts, reproves, prays, and acts. Let us take care not merely to write upon the front of our house, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord ;" but let this inscription be engraved within, on our thoughts, and on the inmost feelings of our heart. Let us take care that he who regards the heart and not the appearance alone, may not have reason, notwithstanding all this external show of religion, to write upon our spiritual temple the inscription which Paul found engraved upon the Athenian altar, "To the unknown God." Acts xvii. 23. Let us take care that we be not of the number of those who "profess to know God but in works deny him."

Let us often go through the secret chambers of our heart to see what dwells there. It must either be Christ or Belial ; for there is no agreement between them. " What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness ? and what communion hath light with darkness ? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols ? " It is impossible, therefore, to divide your house between two masters ; either Satan must be cast out, or Christ must remain at the door. Once more, I ask you, who is in the house ? who dwells there ? who rules it ? who governs it ?

We read in the eighth chapter of Ezekiel, that the Lord, wishing to discover to the prophet the abominations which were committed in the temple, conducted him to the entrance of the court, made him pierce through the wall, and said unto him : " Go in and behold the wicked abominations that they do here." Then the prophet went in and saw, " and behold, every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel pourtrayed upon the wall round about ; " he saw also " seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, with every man his censer in his hand ; and a thick cloud of incense went up." Then the Lord said unto the prophet : " Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery ? for they say, the Lord seeth us not." The prophet is then conducted to another part of the temple, where " there sat women weeping for Tammuz." And the Lord said unto him, " Hast thou seen this, O son of man ? Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations than these." And the Lord conducts him to the inner courts of the Lord's house, and shews him " at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, about five and twenty men,



with their backs toward the temple of the Lord; and their faces toward the east, and they worshipped the sun towards the east."

Now, if the Lord were to pierce the wall of your heart as he made Ezekiel pierce the wall of the temple, and if he were to enable the poor servant of God who addresses you, to look through that opening, and to see what is passing within, might he not say to him in some measure, as he did to Ezekiel, "hast thou seen this, son of man?" Might he not discover to him some of those chambers of imagery, upon the walls of which he would find round about, instead of the image of God, images of all kinds of creatures which are still lodged in our hearts? Might he not see there, as in the temple of Jerusalem, profaned by idolatry, "every form of creeping things and abominable beasts, and all manner of idols?" In one, the representation of the yoke of oxen which he had bought, or of his trade, or of his merchandise: in another, the representation of the object of some carnal lust: in a third, who, like Solomon, has composed books of science, and spoken of "trees and of beasts and of creeping things and of fishes," might he not find the image of all these things, the study of which he has made his idol? In others, would he not find the image of some person, the object of an affection in itself legitimate, but which has degenerated into idolatry; the image of a husband, or of a wife, or of a child, or of a friend: an image which is portrayed upon the wall "round about," and which throws over its worshipper the greater delusion, inasmuch as it gives him a kind of indifference for all other things in this world, and makes him feel estranged from them. If the Lord were to pierce the wall of your hearts, might he not also see these dunghill gods portrayed on the walls? Would he not see you bowing down before

the work of your hands, idolators of your own works, and every one with his censer in his hand, from whence ascends a thick cloud of incense, before the altar of that hideous idol SELF; that SELF which the Scripture calls "abominable and filthy," and whose righteousness is as dross; that SELF so artful in disguising itself, and securing for itself to be worshipped in secret? While we appear to be speaking for God, praying to God, labouring for God, to be engaged in the advancement of his kingdom, and to offer him a homage in which man professes to be nothing, and to disappear that God may be "all in all," would it not be found that by some hidden, subtle, abominable pride, we manage to introduce this SELF into all these things, and to seek our own glory where we appear only to be seeking the glory of God? While we profess to be the temple of God, may we not be our own idol? And may not we ourselves, in a certain sense, be that "man of sin and the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." 2 Thes. ii. 4.

If the Lord were to pierce the wall of our heart, might he not also shew us there "women weeping for Tammuz?" It is supposed that this Tammuz was the same as Adonis, who, according to the pagan fable, was a beautiful youth who was slain in hunting, and for whom it was usual for women to make lamentation every year, associating him with the grief of an impure divinity by whom he was passionately loved. Let us see, then, whether we also in any way weep for Tammuz? When we weep, is it for our own sins or the sins of others? Do our eyes shed rivers of tears because men keep not the law of the Lord? Is our sorrow a godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto

life, or a sorrow of the world which worketh death? Do not we weep for Tammuz? Do not we weep for some person whom death has taken away from us, and who is even yet, even since his departure from this world, an object of idolatry to us? Do we not lament projects of happiness which have disappointed us? Do we not weep on account of the opposition we meet in this world, which prevents us from finding the rest we so obstinately seek after? Do we not weep on account of the sacrifice of all our carnal lusts which we are obliged to make to God? Do we not mourn because we are so poor, so mean, and so miserable? Do we not often bewail ourselves, in a kind of vague melancholy, which is often but the sadness of a heart deceived in its hopes and feeding upon its own sorrow, in place of the happiness which it has failed in attaining? "Hast thou seen this, son of man?"

If the Lord were to pierce the wall of all hearts, would he discover in none what he calls "greater abominations than these," men standing between the porch and the altar (the place where the priests minister unto the Lord) with their backs toward the temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east, worshipping the rising sun? Would he not see in some of those who are called to serve in his house, to be "ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God," that species of idolatry which consists in worshipping the light they have received from God, their knowledge of divine things, and their gift of explaining them; while in heart they turn their back upon the temple of the Lord? Knowledge puffeth up, charity edifieth; when we feel ourselves puffed up, carried away to a spirit of dispute, a bitter zeal, a coldness towards any part of the Israel of God, by any degree of light which

we have received upon some particular point, let us tremble lest we become idolators of knowledge, turning our backs upon the temple of the Lord; let us think that it is time for us to call to mind the words of the apostle spoken in reference to certain persons who allowed themselves to be led away by a spirit of dispute. "Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned, from which some having swerved, have turned aside unto vain jangling." 1 Tim. i. 5, 6.

My brethren, as our heart is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," and as God alone "taketh the wise in their own craftiness;" that we may not be confounded at his coming, we have nothing upon which we can rest, but to say to him, "Lord, pierce the wall of my heart, open all its most secret chambers; come and walk with me through them, and shew me every thing that thou seest there. I would know all my sin: if there be more evil in me than I see, make me to know it. I would survey with thee all that is pourtrayed on the wall of my heart. I would not die with any accursed thing in my possession. I wish my house to be entirely purified. Come thou, O my God, shew me myself, and say to me, 'Seest thou this, son of man?'" I wish to see all; yes, all without exception. Then will I fall at thy feet, and entreat thee to deface these pictured images, and to take away from me the idolatry of self and of the creature,—I will earnestly entreat thee to trace thine own image on every part of my heart, to fill all my powers, to make all my joys, all my sorrows, all my occasions of glorying, centre in thee; in a word, to create in me that new man "after thine own image, in righteousness and true holiness."

By dealing thus sincerely with the Lord our God, we shall feel our heart more and more "stablished unblameable in holiness before him." 1 Thess. iii. 13. Our spiritual house shall be set in order in such a manner, that we shall be able to hear with joy the announcement, "Thou shalt die and not live," and we shall have "boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world." 1 John iv. 17.

## MEDITATION VI.

### HEZEKIAH'S SONG OF THANKSGIVING AFTER HIS SICKNESS.

"The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered from his sickness: I said, in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave: I am deprived of the residue of my years. I said, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord, in the land of the living: I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world. Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent: I have cut off like a weaver my life: he will cut me off with pining sickness: from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me. I reckoned till morning that as a lion, so will he break all my bones: from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me. Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter: I did mourn as a dove: mine eyes fail with looking upward: O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me. What shall I say? he hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it; I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul. O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit: so wilt thou recover me, and make me to live. Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth. The Lord was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord." ISAIAH xxxviii. 9—20.

WE read in the seventeenth chapter of St. Luke's gospel, that when our Lord healed the ten lepers, one only of them, who was a Samaritan, "turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down at the feet of Jesus, giving him thanks;" to whom the Lord "answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that

returned to give glory to God, save this stranger." Luke xvii. 12—18. Is there not in each one of us the same principle of ingratitude which our Lord encountered with grief in these nine lepers? Could we recall to mind all the benefits which the Lord has bestowed upon us, and were we to make a fair calculation, would we find that for one out of ten we had "glorified God with a loud voice, falling down at his feet to give him thanks?" Alas! when we consider how little congenial thanksgiving is to our hearts, we have reason to acknowledge that it is in itself a gift of God, and to say with David, whenever we take the language of praise upon our lips, "He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God." Ps. xl. 3. This grace of glorifying God, after deliverance from trouble, was vouchsafed to Hezekiah: and we have here "the writing of Hezekiah, king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness."

When Hezekiah was restored to health, he thought fit to commit to writing the feelings which he had experienced either during his sickness or after his recovery; doubtless that he might the longer retain the humiliating remembrance of the moments of weakness and despondency through which he had passed, as well as that of the power and mercy of God who had succoured him in his distress. He thought that in perusing the record of these feelings, and the expressions of the gratitude which he had experienced in the first moments of his recovery, he would have a means of renewing those salutary impressions, and reviving them when they were about to fade away.

Before we begin our meditations upon the details of this "writing of Hezekiah," we would inform you, that it contains many difficult passages, upon which we

have not been able to form any decided opinion. But, by the grace of God, we shall not be ashamed to confess our ignorance where we are obliged to be ignorant ; we shall leave to the Lord our God those secret things which belong to him, and take for ourselves and our children, to do them, those things which his Spirit hath revealed.

The writing of Hezekiah begins by recalling those feelings of distress which he had experienced during his sickness. Upon this we repeat a remark which we have already made in meditating upon the history of this prince, namely, with how much more simplicity the believers, of whom we read in the Scriptures, generally relate their inward trials, and speak of their feelings and infirmities, than we do. We have produced many instances of this simplicity, and the confessions of Hezekiah as here recorded afford an additional example. Ah, how easy is it to make a parade of our courage when the danger is past, and when we are delivered from our trials ; to say we had no fears, we were resigned, supported ! How easy is it to act like those boasters of human courage, who, when the battle is over, brag of their achievements, while the really brave are engaged in dressing their wounds which speak for them ! But these vauntings are not what the Lord is pleased with. Though he tells us to "rejoice in the Lord always," to "glory even in tribulation," yet he knows that our actual experience will often come short of this, and as he loves truth, he is not pleased with us when we speak of ourselves according to what we ought to be, and not according to what we really are. Let us beware of this ; it is a source of great mistakes, to confound our knowledge with our practice,—what we know with what we do. O may we feel more comfort in freely confessing our sins and rebellions, that



we may thus be brought to a salutary humiliation and self-abasement, and find pardon and healing at the feet of the Lord! In this respect, how much more instructive and consoling are the lives recorded in the Bible than many of those which are written in our own day! In these we scarcely see the believer except under the aspect of the "new man;" we find him always happy, always strong, and always rejoicing; and, in reading such lives, one is almost tempted to say, Am I a child of God, I who yet find in myself so much weakness? Brethren, ye who are discouraged by this description of religious fictions, come with me to the Word of God which is truth, and which will shew you believers "subject to like passions as we are," James v. 17; believers who cry with us, "The good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do," Rom. vii. 19; believers exhibited with their falls, their contests, their fears, but at the same time with their repentance, their victories, and the continual exemplification of the Lord's "strength made perfect in their weakness." In reading those true accounts of the life of believers whom the Scriptures have denominated "friends of God," we shall be able to take courage, seeing that "the same afflictions have been accomplished in our brethren which have been in the world," 1 Pet. v. 9, we shall be cheered by finding that in their weakness they have been strong; and we shall give the more glory to God, because their infirmities testify that all their strength has been of Him.

WE SHALL NOW ENTER INTO THE DETAILS OF THE  
WRITING OF HEZEKIAH.

VERSE 10—"I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave: I am deprived of the residue of my years."

We see here that man is always disposed either to hope or to fear too much. In health, death is but matter of talk to him, it seems as though it would never overtake him; then when sickness comes, and when it declares itself in a serious manner, he falls into despondency,—imagines that he has no resource left, and appears disposed to say with Hezekiah, “I shall go to the gates of the grave: I am deprived of the residue of my years.” In spiritual things, we act in the same way. When David was in prosperity, and when, by the favour of the Lord, his “mountain was made to stand strong,” he said, “I shall not be moved;” but when the Lord hid his face from him, he could make this humbling confession, “Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled.”

“I am deprived of the residue of my years.” How well do these words describe that delusion so natural to the human heart which imagines that, according to what we call the “course of nature,” we have still a certain number of years before us, and accordingly prepare to enjoy those years as something upon which it can calculate, and which is in a manner its due! When death arrives, as in the case of Hezekiah, at the period which we call the middle of our career; when it surprises us at the age of strength and enterprise; how are we tempted to say with feelings of wonder and discontent, “I am deprived of the residue of my years.” Fools that we are, to make such calculations, knowing that our breath is not in our power, and that the Lord continually exhorts us to avail ourselves of “to-day, while it is called to-day,” as the only time that belongs to us. Heb. iii. 13, 14; iv. 7; 2 Cor. vi. 2. The days we have lived we can count, but not those which remain to us; the past is no longer ours, the future is not in our power, the present moment

alone is in our possession. Let us employ it well, and let us never say, I have many years before me; for our Master has told us, that we know not whether he will come "at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning." Let us then make our calculation, and take our measures in such a manner, that at whatever hour the Lord comes we shall not have reason to say with feelings of surprise and regret, "I am deprived of the residue of my years."

Verse 11—"I said, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord, in the land of the living: I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world."

It is evident that the principal ground of Hezekiah's regret was, that he should no longer be able to enjoy the pleasures of piety and of the service of God upon earth. He had re-established the worship of the true God in his kingdom; the reformation which he had introduced was continually gaining strength; he enjoyed the happiness of seeing the service of the Lord reviving among his subjects, and he regretted to depart at a period which promised to become more and more cheering to a heart jealous of the glory of God, and which found its happiness in seeing him served and adored upon earth. You will tell me, perhaps, that, had Hezekiah died, he would have seen the face of the Lord in righteousness, and have been "satisfied with his likeness," and therefore that he ought to have felt but little regret at not beholding him upon the earth among the living. I answer, first, that Paul himself, notwithstanding his desire to depart and be with Christ, yet could say that he was in "a strait betwixt two," feeling how much he was wanted on earth, and wishing to remain for the good of the churches, and for their advancement in the faith. I answer, secondly, that I can conceive a degree of faith,

so weak, that invisible things being but little realized, the believer would prefer enjoying in this world, and with his brethren whom he loves, the pleasures of piety which he knows, and to which he is habituated, rather than to go and enjoy in heaven pleasures more pure indeed, but which still have for him the vagueness of things unseen, and of which he can form but a faint conception.

Another subject of regret which Hezekiah mentions is, that he should "behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world." He had felt this weakness, if it be such, and ingenuously confesses it. We are not blocks of marble; faith does not extinguish our natural feelings, though it may enable us to overcome them. That faith may arrive at such a degree as to enable the believer to quit, without regret, all the beings whom he has loved in this world, or at least to give him such a longing for things above as shall surmount even the most legitimate and tender affections, cannot be denied, since it has been evinced in the death of many believers. But that there may co-exist, even with a sincere faith, a regret at separating from those whom we leave behind on earth, especially if we be not yet ripe for eternity, can well be conceived; and where this is the case, we should confess it like Hezekiah, instead of affecting a degree of separation from the world which we do not feel. If our regret is too strong we must humble ourselves for it, and ask God to draw off our affections from those beings to whom our hearts are still too devoted.

"I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world." I would invite you to consider for a moment the point of view under which death is here represented to us. In this world what engages our attention, what engrosses us, what perhaps deceives us, is

the sight of other men, their opinion, their company. Who can say what part the opinion of others, their influence, and their example may have in our religion, in the career which we pursue, and in the estimation which we form of ourselves? Who knows what we would find ourselves really to be; were we to stand before God, alone, divested of all human appendages, separated from all others who lead us, support us, or commend us; brought down to our real worth, reduced to appear just what we are; to feel and to think only what we feel and think independently of all human influence? It is good, sometimes, in imagination, to place ourselves by anticipation in that solitary position in which death will shortly place us, to set ourselves apart from all creatures, and to meet, as it were, face to face, this thought: "Men have disappeared from around me, and there is none here but myself and God." Were we to do this, we would be less occupied with men, and much more with Him "with whom we have to do."

Since there is a day coming when we shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of this world, how does it behove us to disengage our hearts from the creatures, and to take heed lest even the most legitimate ties should be drawn so closely as to attach us too much to the earth! Let us often shut our eyes upon the vanities of the world and upon visible things, for soon shall they be really closed upon them. The grave will soon cover us, and we shall no more "behold man with the inhabitants of the world." Let us accustom ourselves to live much with Christ, and let us not allow ourselves either to be dissipated or engrossed by the society of man, even by that of the people of God. Beyond this world is the place of great and eternal reunion; here we meet but in passing, to help each

other, and to excite one another to the combat. Soon shall we have to pass even from the society of the people of God on earth.

Verse 12—" Mine age is departed, and is removed, from me, as a shepherd's tent: I have cut off like a weaver my life: he will cut me off with pining sickness: from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me."

The Scriptures make use of various images to pourtray to us the uncertainty of life: here they employ that of a hut or tent, an image which St. Paul also makes use of, when, in writing to the Corinthians, he says, " We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened." 2 Cor. v. 4. A tent or a hut is a small portable habitation, which is easily removed from one place to another. Such is our body. Though it is " clothed with skin and flesh, and fenced with bones and sinews;" though with men of vigorous constitutions it seems to be of iron, to use a common phrase, and appears capable of all hardships and all fatigues, yet even with those it is but a poor tent, which God takes down and folds up as he sees fit. " He putteth no trust in his servants; how much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth." Job iv. 19. " Thou prevailest for ever against him," says Job, " and he passeth: thou changest his countenance and sendest him away." Job xiv. 20.

Our body is, as it were, " a shepherd's tent." A shepherd abides under his tent to keep watch over his flock; we also have something to watch over; our soul, for the loss of which, the whole world could not compensate us; our soul which belongs to the Lord, for whom we ought carefully to guard it, and who

tells us continually, "Watch, and be sober." Let us act in such a manner, that, when the Lord comes to take down the tent, and to remove it, the shepherd "may be found watching."

"I have cut off like a weaver my life; he will cut me off with pining sickness." Here the Holy Spirit employs a new comparison to illustrate the uncertainty of life. He compares us to a weaver employed to manufacture a piece of cloth, and liable, from one moment to another, to be required by his master to cut the thread, and submit his work for inspection. We have all a web to weave for our Master; every minute, every second, the shuttle passes and repasses, leaving after it a thread—a thought, a word, an action. "My days," saith Job, "are swifter than a weaver's shuttle." Job vii. 6. What shall be the length of our web, we know not; we may be called to cut it even at the commencement. What is important for us is to know whether, when we come to present it to our employer, he shall find it made according to his instructions. It is not with the length of the piece that we have to do; this depends not upon us. Our business is to see that what we have made be good, that our web be according to the dimensions prescribed in the Word of God: that the warp which we have used be the love of God, and that we have wrought it under the influences of his Holy Spirit. It is said of the hypocrite, that his confidence shall be like "a spider's web;" and elsewhere we read of those whose "webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works." Let us take heed that we make not spider's webs, which may deceive the eyes of men, but will not abide the inspection of the Master. Let us not work without Christ, for "without him we can do nothing."

Let us also beware of deceiving ourselves as to the length of the web which remains for us to make. Let us acknowledge, with candour, that there are few among us who seem to think that they are near the place where the web must be cut. Too often we set before us a multitude of things which we imagine must be done before we die. One says, I have my children to educate and to provide for; another, I have my house to build; another, my affairs to regulate, an establishment to form; again another, useful projects, pious enterprises to put into execution, and bring to a happy termination; I require for this a certain time, and, please God, I hope it will be granted me. But suddenly, in the midst of all these projects for the future, sickness comes, or, as we have often seen among ourselves, sudden death, and cuts the thread. Then, behold the children educated, the house built, the affairs settled, the establishment formed, the projects completed;—all is ended, entirely ended for this world. Was it, then, worth while to make all those things which, in imagination, we conjured up in the future, the subject of so many anxieties or of so many hopes? Ought we to have allowed them to interpose themselves between the tomb and us to hide it from our view?

“From day even to night wilt thou make an end of me.” Behold, what may happen to any of us; let us therefore, every morning, prepare ourselves to spend the day as if we were to die that night.

Verse 13—“I reckoned till morning, that, as a lion so will he break my bones; from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me.”

It often happens that the view of God’s mercy is, as it were, veiled to his people in their afflictions. They cannot see their trials as marks of his love; he appears to



them as an enemy, and seems to be fighting against them. They say with Job, "He writeth bitter things against me; he teareth me in his wrath who hateth me: he gnasheth upon me with his teeth: mine enemy sharpeneth his eyes upon me." Job xiii. 26; xvi. 9. And with Jeremiah: "Surely against me is he turned: he turneth his hand against me all the day. Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer. He was unto me as a bear lying in wait and as a lion in secret places." Lam. iii. 3, 8, 10. This melancholy state arises either from the Lord's hiding his face from us to prove us and chastise us, or from the enemy taking advantage of the afflictions which the Lord sends, to work upon our imagination and throw us into despondency, by persuading us that the Lord chastises us as his enemies, and not as his children. Whatever be the cause of such a state of distrust and fear, it is always a culpable weakness; for it can never cease to be true that "God is love;" that he "chastens us for our profit," and that "though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies: for he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." If we should ever fall into this kind of despondency, let us try to remember that it is we who "tear ourselves in anger," and by our unbelief make the Lord appear cruel as a lion, while he represents himself as having the tenderness of a mother. Let us remember that the severity of his chastisements by no means proves that his heart is hard towards us, and that he is become an enemy; but that it only evinces that the hardness of our heart is great, that sin is deeply rooted in us, and that the necessity of our passing through the fire is very pressing. Let us view the Lord in such cases, as a compassionate physician who cuts off or plucks out the gangrened member,

and loves his patient sufficiently to save him from long and dreadful agonies, by a momentary suffering, however painful it may be. Moreover, our imagination, when clouded by the grief which present evils occasion generally exaggerates, to our view, the evils of the future. Hezekiah reckoned till morning "that as a lion God would break his bones," and that he should not see the evening of the following day, and yet it would appear that on that very morning Isaiah was sent to promise him deliverance. Let us fear to be rash in our anticipations, and unjust towards God, by predicting in our despondency that he will push our afflictions to an extreme; for who are we that we should presume to decide upon a future, which is in the hands of Him who ruleth according to his will, and whose thoughts are not like our thoughts? Who are we, especially, that we should say of Him who is "full of compassion and merciful," that he will not have mercy or compassion upon us.

Verse 14—"Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter: I did mourn as a dove: mine eyes fail with looking upward: O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me."

Hezekiah recalls to mind, that in his distress he uttered groans, like the cries of certain birds whose plaintive notes are the most inarticulate, and are little more than a kind of confused sound. He knew not what he said; he was only able to chatter like the crane or the swallow, or to mourn like the dove that has lost her mate. David also said, on a similar occasion, "I am like a pelican in the wilderness: I am like an owl in the desert; I watch and am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop." There are sometimes moments in the life of the child of God, when, to represent the state of his soul, it seems to him that he must seek among the

creatures those which are most plaintive and the most forsaken, or those which most shun the society of men and love to plunge into solitude. It is in such moments that David says, "Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest." Ps. lv. 5—8. Such moments are certainly moments of weakness, when the light of faith is obscured, and the child of God can say with David, "The light of mine eyes is gone from me." These are the "days of darkness" of which the Preacher speaks, and which to some souls are "many." The consolation of the child of God, in these gloomy days, is to wait upon the Lord "like those that watch for the morning." It is his consolation to be able to say with David, "When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path," Ps. cxlii. 3,—to be persuaded that even in such a state the Lord follows us with an eye of mercy, that in all our affliction he is afflicted with us, and that by faith we can have a glimpse of better days, and say, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me. Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine hands." Ps. cxxxviii. 7, 8.

"Mine eyes fail with looking upward."

David made the same complaint. "My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word. Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?" Ps. cxix. 81, 82. Then think it not strange if you should fall into a similar state, where your eyes shall be, as it were, wearied with looking in vain to Him from whom you expect succour. This by no means proves that you are not a child of God, and that

the Lord has forsaken you, since many others of God's people testify that they have trodden this path before you. In this state, how miserable soever it may appear to you, you have still one certain mark of your relationship as a child of God; it is, that, with Hezekiah, you look upward, and, with David, you take heed unto the word of God, and seek for the consolations which the Holy Spirit imparts. The worldly man, in his distress, looks to the earth, the carnal man seeks the arm of flesh; but the child of God looks upward, and says, "I lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help; my help cometh from the Lord which made heaven and earth." He who has known the light, turns in the hour of darkness towards the place from whence he knows it will arise upon him again, but the blind man, who walks in perpetual darkness, wearies not his eye in watching for the first dawning of the day, and looking toward that part of the horizon where the sun, which has never ravished his sight, shall arise. The one is really blind, the other sees, but is in temporary darkness. The difference between them is great.

"O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me."

Hezekiah here acknowledges that he is bowed down by enemies more powerful than himself. These enemies were bodily sufferings, dejection of mind, and perhaps gloomy thoughts which Satan suggested to him, taking advantage of the moment of his trial to overwhelm him. He acknowledges that God alone can help and deliver him; and he applies to him for succour. It was with the same feelings that David cried, "Lord, how are they increased that trouble me? many are they that rise up against me. Arise, O Lord, save me, O my God." Ps. iii. 1, 7. And in another place, "Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive

with me : fight against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for mine help. Draw out also the spear, and stop the way against them that persecute me : say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." Ps. xxxv. 1—3. How happy is the child of God when it is given him thus to approach the Lord in his weakness ; to tell him without fear that he has no strength ; that instead of being conqueror, he is conquered ; and to implore deliverance from him, like a terrified child who flies for protection into the embrace of his father. This is the moment for which the Lord waits to stretch forth his arm and deliver us. " When the righteous cry, the Lord heareth and delivereth them out of all their troubles." Ps. xxxiv. 17. " I called upon the Lord," said David, " in distress ; the Lord answered me, and set me in a large place." Ps. cxviii. 5. O how do we deceive ourselves, when we imagine that to be welcome to the Lord, we must feel some strength, and be able, at least to a certain extent, to resist our enemies ! Alas ! it is quite the reverse. The idea that we have still some strength of our own is often that which prevents our prayers from being fully heard. God often says to us, as he did to Gideon, " The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me." Judges, vii. 2. The Lord treats us as a physician treats a patient, who has that kind of false strength which fever imparts, and which must be reduced and weakened in order to effect a cure. Let us not then be alarmed when the Lord thus weakens us, in order to strengthen us afterwards with his glorious power. Let us not fear when we are reduced from weakness to weakness, so that we are brought to say with David, " Have mercy upon

me, O Lord, for I am weak," Ps. vi. 2, and with Hezekiah, "Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me." It is often in such an extremity of distress, that we approach the period of deliverance; "for the Lord giveth power to the faint; and to them who have no might he increaseth strength," Isa. xl. 29; and "girdeth with strength those that stumbled." 1 Sam. ii. 4. The moment when Hezekiah cried, "Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me," was the moment when his lamentations ended, and when that deliverance, which he commemorates in the following verses, began.

Verse 15—"What shall I say? he hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it: I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul."

The interpretation of this passage presents many difficulties, which have been acknowledged by those who have endeavoured to explain this portion of the word of God. When Hezekiah cries, "What shall I say? he hath spoken unto me, and himself hath done it;" does he mean that in his sickness he had lost all hope of being cured, because God himself had commanded him by the prophet Isaiah, "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live;" and that therefore the sentence was irrevocable? But how can we reconcile this sense with the concluding part of the verse, where he speaks of his life as about to be prolonged for many years, during which he would "go softly in the bitterness of his soul!" This is the difficulty connected with the first interpretation. Others have thought that the commencement of the verse expressed a feeling of surprise and joy, mingled with gratitude, and founded upon the promise of recovery communicated to him by the prophet Isaiah in the name of the Lord, and confirmed by the event. "What shall I say? he hath spoken unto me, and himself hath done it," that is, How

shall I express all my joy, all my gratitude to the Lord ! The Lord himself hath sent to tell me, " I will add unto thy days fifteen years ;" he hath kept his promise ; and at the end of three days I have been enabled to go up into the house of the Lord. " What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits unto me." Ps. cxvi. 12. This interpretation is beautiful, but how can we reconcile it with the rest of the verse, where, supposing Hezekiah restored, full of joy and gratitude, we hear him saying, " I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul." Perhaps the best way to make the two parts of the verse harmonize, is to render the word in the original here translated *in*, by the preposition *upon*, which is, in fact, its most literal meaning. In this case, Hezekiah would say, " I shall go softly," that is, humbly and peaceably, " all my years, upon the bitterness of my soul," or, in other words, keeping the remembrance of that bitterness of soul through which I have passed, and which shall be to me a continual ground of humiliation, and, at the same time, of confidence in God, who has delivered me. This interpretation appears satisfactory, and we shall dwell for a little on the instruction which it contains, when we come to meditate on the following verse, which seems to offer the natural development of it.

Verse 16—" O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit : so wilt thou recover me and make me to live."

This verse, also, presents some obscurity. What are the things by which men live ? Some say, the promises of God, which Hezekiah had recorded in the preceding verse : God has spoken ; he has promised life, and it is by faith in his promise we must obtain it ; hence even before I am restored, I can rest

upon that promise, and say, "Thou wilt recover me and make me to live." This interpretation is admissible; but we would observe, that in this verse Hezekiah is speaking of the "life of the soul," and not of the life of the body; and we are therefore inclined to adopt another interpretation, which, at the same time, agrees better with the explanation we have given of the preceding verse. It is as follows:—The things by which men live, in which, Hezekiah says, consists the life of his spirit, are afflictions and bitterness of soul, followed by deliverance, and by the remembrance of what there was of a humiliating nature in the trial.

In fact, it is well known, that spiritual life is preserved only by repeated trials, which give us a humiliating experience of our deep sinfulness, and an encouraging experience of the powerful and rich mercy of the Lord, that rises above all our infirmities, relieves all, pardons all, heals all. Thus, "tribulation worketh patience, and patience, experience; and experience, hope." In whom do we find a steady courage without rashness and without boasting? Is it not in the soldier that has gone through many a campaign, and has grown old amid the fatigues of war. What trees are the strongest, and have the hardest wood? Those which have grown among the rocks, and amid the tempest. In whom do we find the Christian life most vigorous, and Christianity most practical? In whom do we find the most genuine humility, the deepest acquaintance with the devices of the heart, the most unshaken confidence in the promises? In those who have passed through most trials and contests, who have been most frequently humbled, who have seen what we are in sickness, in painful separations, in persecutions, in distress of mind, and in temptations of every description. These coming out of "great tribu-



lation," have often felt their inbred corruption, and their impotence for every thing that is good; these speak not unadvisedly with their lips, nor boast themselves of the morrow. They "go softly," humbly, with caution, yet at the same time with firmness; knowing by experience in whom they have believed, and what are the unlooked for resources which God affords his people in the day of trial; they can say with David, "O God, who is like unto thee! Thou, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth. Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side." Ps. lxxi. 19—21.

Those to whom God has often appeared to shew himself severe, and who have frequently been deprived of the light of his countenance, are also those who, when they have again found that light, and have seen happier days rising upon them, feel best the whole value of that peace of God which passeth all understanding, and cling most firmly to Him of whose presence they had been for so long a time bereft. It is such that can say, with the spouse in the Book of Canticles, "I found him whom my soul loveth, I held him and would not let him go." Cant. iii. 4. In a word, the whole tenor of Christian experience proves that it is by frequent "bitterness of soul," followed by deliverances, that a man has "the life of his spirit." Subject of great consolation to those who often pass through such tribulations! These afflictions, which at first sight appeared to them a cause of dejection and not of joy, will afterwards, when they have been exercised thereby, produce in them the peaceable fruits of righteousness. Let them cheer up, and learn to wait; better days will come, when the remembrance of their past afflictions will be the life of their spirit. The Lord brings them

into the wilderness "to humble them, and to prove them, and to do them good at their latter end." He says to them, as to the spouse in *Hosea*, "Behold, I will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her." "Thus saith the Lord," as another prophet says, "Refrain thy voice from weeping and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded saith the Lord; and there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord." *Jer. xxxi. 16, 17.*

Verse 17—"Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back."

As on a serene day there arises in the horizon "a little cloud like a man's hand," which in a short time covers the heavens, veils the light of day, and brings "the sound of abundance of rain," and a tempestuous wind, so oftentimes; by the will of God, there comes upon us a bitterness which suddenly troubles the peace of our souls, spreads over us, as it were, a veil of sadness, and excites violent storms in our hearts; so that we can say, like *Hezekiah*, "for peace I had great bitterness." Let us remember, that while we are in this world we are in the region of tempests; and let us never calculate on a long season of rest. It is especially when we slumber in a time of calm; when we say "peace and safety" by ceasing to watch; it is then especially that we have reason to expect from the Lord, who loves us, some squall to awake us. Too long a peace is not good for our souls; "through much affliction we must enter into the kingdom of heaven." Hence we ought, in a certain sense, "to rejoice with trembling;" we ought to be like soldiers who wait for the battle, and "to put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand in the evil day." Let us

fear to be like the people of Laish, who "dwelt careless, quiet, and secure," because "there was no magistrate in the land that might put them to shame in any thing," Judges xviii. 7, and who, in the midst of their security, were surprised by the enemy who found them undefended, and utterly destroyed them.

On the other hand, when great bitterness comes upon us, let us never think that it is without remedy, but let us be persuaded, that if we flee to the Lord, we shall soon be enabled to say, with Hezekiah, "Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption." It may sometimes seem as though our foot had slipped on the verge of the abyss, and we were rolling from temptation to temptation, from one degree of weakness to another, and from one degree of unbelief to another, and in danger of falling into the pit of corruption. We then seem to feel the last breath of life on the point of expiring in us : and in our despondency we are ready to say, "My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord." But at the same moment, a powerful hand coming to our relief, when there is "none to help us," seizes us, and holds us back. We find that we are surrounded and embraced by the "everlasting arms." The power and mercy of our God brings us up "out of the horrible pit ; He sets our feet upon a rock," and places us there in security. We ought then never to say, I have sunk too deep for the Lord to raise me up. And as in peace we ought to expect trials, so in our trials we ought not to despair of deliverance.

Observe now to what it is that Hezekiah ascribes the favour which God had shewed him in "delivering him from the pit of corruption." It is to his having "cast all his sins behind his back." All mercies begin at the cross of Christ, and take their rise from the pardon of

sin. Let us ever regard our reconciliation to God by the blood of Christ as the first of mercies, and as that from which all others flow ; and let us assure ourselves of this by “believing in Him who justifieth the ungodly.” What can we ask of God with confidence, so long as we are not reconciled to Him ? On the contrary, with what boldness can we ask any thing of him, when we are assured that he has “cast all our sins behind his back ?” We can then adopt at all times, that reasoning at once so simple and so conclusive : “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things ?” Rom. viii. 32.

Observe also the force of the expression, “Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.” We see not what is behind us ; and however disgusting it may be, it excites in us no repugnance. Such, then, is the position which our God is pleased to assume towards us in the covenant of grace ; he regards us as perfectly righteous, because “the blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin ;” our sins have disappeared from his view ; he himself has cast them behind his back, and in this sense “he beholds not iniquity in Jacob, neither doth he see perverseness in Israel.” Numb. xxiii. 21. His church, which he hath sanctified and cleansed for himself, appears unto him “a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing,” Eph. iv. 27 ; and he saith to it, “Thou art all fair, my love ; there is no spot in thee.” Cant. iv. 7.

Observe also that Hezekiah says, Thou hast cast *all* my sins behind thy back ; *all*, not some, nor a great part, nor almost all, but *all* ; yes, *all*, without exception. This the Word of God constantly asserts. It tells us, that “with the Lord there is plenteous redemption,” and that “he will redeem Israel from all his

iniquities." Ps. cxxx. 7, 8. David blesses the Lord, because "he forgiveth all his iniquities." Psalm ciii. In Jeremiah, the Lord makes this glorious promise, "I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me." Jer. xxxiii. 8. The prophet Micah expresses himself in similar terms, when he says, "He will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." The apostle Paul declares that these promises have been accomplished in Christ. "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." Col. ii. 13, 14.

O my brethren, my poor companions in the sin and misery entailed by Adam! let not your unbelief retrench aught from the mercies of God; let it not diminish the consolation which the word *all* contains when applied to the pardon of sins. All my sins; that means, in the language of the God of truth, the sins of my whole past life, in thought, word and action; sins known and sins secret; vile, degrading, odious, excusable sins; sins which excited my own indignation; such sins as, perhaps, I dare not avow to any one; repeated sins, continual falls, a monstrous tissue of rebellion, selfishness, hypocrisy, and pride; in a word, all that can be conceived most frightful in number and in enormity, all that can confound the imagination, overwhelm the conscience, astonish the sinner himself, amazed at his own iniquity; all this, and nothing less than this, constitutes "all my sins;" and this is what

God has cast behind his back, what he forgets, pardons; remembers no more, when I bring them with sincere repentance to the foot of the cross. Nothing short of this is the grace of God; the pardon which he offers me—the pardon which I need. If only one, yes, only one of my sins be excepted, if it be not blotted out, this single sin presses upon my soul like a weight; torments me, condemns, subjects me to the curse denounced against him that “continueth not in all things written in the law to do them.” That the Gospel should be glad tidings to me—that it should set my heart at liberty—that it should give joy to my soul—it must be presented to me as that God has given it, who abundantly pardons; it must be that Gospel in which Jesus tells me, that “all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men;” that Gospel in which it is declared, on his part, that “by him all that believe are justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.” Acts xiii. 39.

My brethren, I repeat it once more, let us not retrench aught from the mercies of God, let us not make him a liar. Since he has said *all*, let us believe that he means *all*; and let us say, with assurance of faith, “He has cast all my sins behind his back.” However great the mercy of God may be, it is not too great for us; and if we take away any thing from it, and if the word *all* does not signify literally *all* for us, then there is no peace for our souls; “the bed is shorter than that we can stretch ourselves on it: and the covering narrower than that we can wrap ourselves in it.” Let us then believe with a sincere confidence in the whole mercy of our God; let us rejoice in his promises; let us cast ourselves upon our face on the ground, adoring “the love of Christ which passeth all understanding;”

and let us ask of the Lord a heart which shall respond to that love.

Here we only remark, that in order to be able to enjoy the consolation which the assurance that God has cast all our sins behind his back affords, we must, by a sincere confession, place them with humiliation both before our own eyes and his ; for 'it is written, that " If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John i. 9. Before conversion, and in the painful time which often follows it, the sinner excuses his sins, hides them, dissembles, and does not bring them with openness to the foot of the cross ; then, by a just punishment, it seems to him that his sins come up again before God, and he is compelled to say with Moses, " Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance." Ps. xc. 8. But as soon as he becomes sincere,—as soon as he ceases to flatter himself, and sees his wickedness in all its native deformity,—as soon as he lays open his sins before God just as they are and without any disguise, immediately he feels that the pardon of his sins is applied anew to his conscience, and that the Lord casts behind his back those transgressions, of which the sinner himself can say, " I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me." Would you then habitually feel that God casts all your sins behind his back, place them continually before yourself and before Him, in a spirit of humiliation and repentance.

Verse 18—"For the grave cannot praise thee ; death cannot celebrate thee : they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth.

Verse 19—"The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day : the father to the children shall make known thy truth.

Verse 20—"The Lord was ready to save me : therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord."

The first general reflection which we make on these verses is, that God preserves our life that we may praise him. The existence of the Christian has no other end than that of shewing forth "the praises of him who hath called him out of darkness into his marvellous light, that he might shine as a light in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation,"—of letting "his light so shine among men, that they may see his good works, and glorify his Father which is in heaven." This obligation of living to glorify God by our words and actions exists at all times ; but it is redoubled when God has vouchsafed to us some great deliverance, when after a severe sickness he has restored us our health, or when after some deep distress of soul he has caused the light of his countenance to shine upon us anew. After having called upon God in the day of our distress, and being heard, let us not forget to glorify him, and to say with Hezekiah, "The Lord was ready to save me : therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord."

Verse 18—"The grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee : they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth."

These words of Hezekiah, spiritually applied, contain an important truth. When we descend into the pit of unbelief ; when, ceasing to rely upon God's promises, we lose the enjoyment of spiritual life, we cannot praise the Lord. When we fall under the spirit of bondage, and when we wear what the Scripture calls "the garment of heaviness ;" when, to use an expression of the Holy Spirit, we are "among the dead like



the slain that lie in the grave;" then the mouth is closed to the voice of thanksgiving, and is opened only to give utterance to lamentations and groanings. Be assured, then, that if you praise the Lord but little, it is because you have but little confidence and but little spiritual life. Health and life make a man rejoice and sing as well in a spiritual sense as in a temporal. Behold our children, when they are well, how happy they are, and how they express their joy by the innocent songs of their age. See also the inferior animals, when they gather the food which is given them by that liberal hand which "fillet all things living with plenteousness;" when they enjoy the verdant shade which the Creator's bounty has prepared for them; how they rejoice and express their contentment by various joyful cries, and make their voices echo among the branches. The Scriptures represent even the inanimate creation as having a kind of voice whereby it celebrates the Creator, who makes it rich in the good things which he causes it to produce: "The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing." Ps. lxx. 13.

May our God, if he see fit to exercise us by temporal or spiritual trials, be pleased afterwards to lift up the light of his countenance upon us, and to restore life to us, that we may celebrate his name! May we be enabled continually to confide in his truth, and through a cheerful dependance "upon his exceeding great and precious promises," to "make a joyful noise unto the Rock of our salvation; to come before his presence with thanksgiving, and to make a joyful noise unto him with psalms!" Ps. xcvi. 1, 2. As the Lord takes pleasure in our praises, we may, when we are in trouble, present this as a motive to engage him to

deliver us, and say to him, with David, "Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee!" The royal prophet more than once makes use of this same motive with God to engage him to come to his assistance. In the thirtieth Psalm, having told us that the Lord had hid his face from him, and that he had been troubled, he adds, "I cried to thee, O Lord; and unto the Lord I made supplication. What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise thee? shall it declare thy truth? Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me: Lord, be thou my helper. Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; to the end that my glory may sing praise unto thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever." Ps. xxx. 8—12.

"The father to the children shall make known thy truth."

It was certainly a natural feeling in Hezekiah, who had just been the object of so great a deliverance, to wish to consecrate a part of the time which the Lord had granted him to the training up of his children in the knowledge and love of Him who had restored him to life. But is not this also the sacred duty of all parents to whom God has vouchsafed to give spiritual life, and to whom he continues it, notwithstanding so much unfaithfulness and negligence on their part; to us who, if I may so express myself, so often, through our own fault, see our souls on the verge of the grave, and whom the Lord so frequently delivers from going down into the pit of corruption; to us, in fine, whose bodily life our God preserves amid so many causes of death which surround us, and which remove other parents from their families? Should we not, like Hezekiah, say, with hearts full of gratitude, "The

father to the children shall make known thy truth."

This duty is clearly imposed upon us by the Word of God: "Ye fathers," it says, "provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Eph. vi. 4. These words teach us, with sufficient plainness, from whence we ought to derive our directions for the education of our children, and what sort of instruction we ought to give them for their souls. Many voluminous books have been written on the subject of education. And, if it would be going too far to congratulate you at not having time to read them, I think I may at least congratulate you that you have been able to do without them. It is infinitely more easy to write long treatises on the education of children, and to reason much upon the subject, than to educate well one single child. There is one book which is sufficient for every one, which, thanks be to God, is in the hands of all, and is level to every comprehension,—that book is the Word of the God of truth. It is to this book that Hezekiah would bring his children: "The father," he says, "to the children shall make known thy truth." Now, we know that the truth of God is contained only in his word; Jesus, in praying for his disciples, said, "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth." It is about the Word of God that we are commanded to converse with our children. In Deut. vi. 6, 7, the Lord says to his people, "These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." In the seventy-eighth Psalm, Asaph declares, in the name of the fathers and mothers of Israel, that they would not hide from

their children the "words of the mouth of the Lord," and the great things which they had "heard and known, and their fathers had declared unto them;" and he adds, that their object was, that their children might in their turn shew "unto the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he had done." He founds this duty on the positive order of God: "He hath established," he says, "a testimony in Jacob, and he appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: and might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God." Psalm lxxviii. 5—8. Can we, without guilt and folly, neglect to obey the commands of God, who has prepared, for the nourishment of the souls of our dear children, "the sincere milk of the word?" Can we neglect to make them acquainted with a book which is calculated to satisfy all their wants? In fact, what do we want for them? That they may be instructed, convinced, corrected of all their faults, and thoroughly furnished unto every good work. Well, then, the Scriptures are destined by God to produce these effects: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. He who believes that God has spoken truth in pronouncing these words, will take the Scriptures

with confidence as the foundation of the religious instruction of his children, and will bless the Lord that he has in his hand a book which is calculated to effect in them all that his heart can desire.

We cannot doubt that God is pleased with the father who follows his intentions by training up his children according to the word of truth, and that he will bless him and his. This faithfulness in educating his children in the ways of God, is represented in Gen. xviii. as one of the principal titles of Abraham to the divine favor: "And the Lord said, shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; for I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment." On the contrary, we see the fearful threatenings denounced against Eli, the high priest, and the terrible chastisements which fell upon his family, on account of "the iniquity which he knew, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." Therefore it is that the Lord addressed to him this severe reprimand: "Wherefore honourest thou thy sons above me? I said indeed that thy house and the house of thy father should walk before me for ever; but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." 1 Sam. ii. 29, 30.

Hoping now that you would not wish to deprive yourselves and your children of the blessing promised to the families in which the Lord is known and served, I shall proceed to give, in a few words, some general directions upon the instruction and education of children, following the leadings of the Holy Scriptures: May the Spirit of God write them upon your memories and upon your hearts.

As to the manner of instructing them, I now take for granted, as a point upon which we are agreed, that you will teach them out of the Word of God ; and, setting out from this, I exhort you :

1. To begin this instruction as soon as possible, thus obeying the word, which commands us to "train up a child in the way he should go." Prov. xxii. 6. Be on your guard against the maxims of that false wisdom which says, "Your children are too young ; they cannot comprehend subjects so profound ; wait until their understanding is developed ; take care lest you should work on their imagination, and injure them by occupying them about such serious matters." To prove that this is the language of an enemy, it is sufficient to reflect that it is in open contradiction to that positive command of Scripture which we have just quoted. This artful language only covers, with a kind of veil, the real intention of the enemy ; and reducing it to its genuine signification, and to the meaning which it has in the mind of the tempter, it amounts to saying, "Let me quietly sow tares in the hearts of little children ; let me develope there every kind of evil and of error ; let me get possession of the first impressions, which are always the strongest ; then, at a later period, when the child has become a reasoner, and the passions have begun to develope themselves, try, if you can, to inculcate your principles, and to sow the seed of the Word in the ground which I have already filled with tares." Ah! my brethren, leave to those who have the misfortune to be in darkness, the melancholy privilege of allowing themselves to be taken by such reasonings of the enemy, presented, as they often are, with all the attractions which the talents of a man of genius and a great writer have been able to give them. But let

not us, who are children of the light, be ignorant of the devices of Satan. "The word of God is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path;" it tells us, "Train up a child in the way he should go;" and let us be assured that it cannot deceive us; be obedient to its counsel, in the firm confidence that the Lord, who has given us this command, has caused his word to be written in such a manner as to be level to the comprehension of little children.

Besides, what do they mean when they speak of things being too difficult for children? Do they mean that children cannot fathom the mysteries of the Bible, nor comprehend the *how* and the *wherefore* of what God has revealed? And I myself, am I able to understand them? Must I not myself say, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. It is high as heaven; what can I do? deeper than hell, what can I know?" Am I not obliged to "receive the kingdom of God as a little child?" We do not speak of attempting to explain mysteries to children, but of presenting them to them just as God has revealed them to us, of making them the object of their faith, and of drawing from them consequences applicable to their daily conduct: "Secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children for ever." Deut. xxix. 29.

Far from finding that the Word of God is too difficult for children to comprehend, those who instruct them out of that holy book cannot but wonder how God has brought the most profound subjects down to their comprehension, by presenting them under the form of historical facts extremely simple, and adapted to engage their attention. Make a child read the first four chapters of Genesis, the first and last chapters of

St. Luke's gospel; when you have completed this course, the child will have read nothing but historical narrations, and yet he is already acquainted with the deepest doctrines. He knows who created the world; how sin entered into it; how, in consequence of sin, the curse of God was spread over the whole world; he knows that God sent his Son into the world to save that which was lost, and that whosoever believeth in Him obtains the pardon of his sins and the Holy Spirit to change his heart. All these doctrines have entered into his understanding, not under a dry systematic form, destitute of life, but under the living form of real facts,—facts which interest him, facts which bear stamped upon them the impress of truth, disposing the mind to believe them; facts, in fine, which have the advantage of continually reminding him that religion is not a system but a life, a train of relations between the Creator and the creature.

Instead of these few chapters which I have just mentioned, make your child read, even at a more advanced age, some chapters of reasoning upon the existence of God, his perfections, or whatever you deem it useful to teach him on the subject of religion; and you will see whether you will succeed better in enlightening his understanding and engaging his heart. Facts speak loudly here, and experience proves that a child instructed from his earliest years out of the Word of God, learns to know without effort, and often has the happiness to believe things about which the understandings of sages and philosophers have for ages been laboriously exercised. Resting upon the authority of the Bible, in which he has a simple and childlike faith, he decides, with peace and certainty, where the heart of the wise man of this world, after the longest and deepest meditation, is a prey to doubt and perplexity.



The children of Jerusalem, without hesitation, cried out in the presence of Jesus, "Hosanna to the son of David!" while the learned men of the nation, perplexed in all their wisdom, said to Jesus, "How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." John x. 24. Who would not exclaim with the prophet, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise, because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger." Mat. xxi. 16; Ps. viii. 2.

2. In instructing children, give them little at a time; the Word of God teaches us, that we must give them "line upon line, precept upon precept; here a little and there a little." The attention of children quickly flags, and is soon overcharged. Long discourses weary them, many words destroy the effect of one another, and the last obliterate the former. One short sentence, on which a child has time to fix its little attention, makes a deeper impression upon him than a multitude of words, which only leave confusion in his mind. When you make them read the Scriptures, do not think yourselves obliged to add long explanations. Endeavour only to make them seize well the simple and natural sense of the portion which you have read for them; then, by asking one or two questions, try to make them draw out of it for themselves some useful instruction." In this we have the example of our Lord as a guide. After relating the parable of the good Samaritan to the lawyer who had said to him, "Who is my neighbour?" He contents himself with asking him, "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour to him who fell among thieves?" and upon the answer which is made to him, "He that shewed mercy on him;" he adds simply this short exhortation, "Go and do thou likewise." Luke x. 29, 37.

3. Seek to instruct and exhort your children by availing yourselves of every circumstance which affords you an occasion for speaking to them, or seems a support or application of what you say to them. That which is associated with an event of common life makes a deeper impression, strikes the mind more, and is better understood, than that which is presented under the form of a lesson of instruction at a stated time. Without condemning fixed hours for religious instruction, I can assure you that the best hours are those which you do not seek for, and when God opens a door which quite naturally gives occasion to some exhortation or instruction : " A word spoken in season, how good is it ! " Besides, it is essential that children see religion in a manner blended with the habitual course of life, and not kept apart, and banished, so to speak, to a few hours of stated instruction.

4. Always instruct your children with mildness and with seriousness. With mildness, that you may not discourage and sour them by presenting religion under the aspect of a perpetual scolding ; with seriousness, to make them feel that what you tell them is of the highest importance.

We might apply to the two last rules which we have just mentioned, the precepts of St. Paul to his disciples Timothy and Titus, " Be instant in season, out of season ; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." 2 Tim. iv. 2. " In doctrine, shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity." Tit. ii. 7.

The preceding rules properly regard the *instruction* of your children : we shall now give you some relative to their *education*.

1. Above all, let us be upright in the end which we propose to ourselves, and towards which we would direct the education of our children. Let us beware

of wishing to give them just enough of religion to enable them to conduct themselves in a decent and moral manner, but not enough to conduct themselves as "citizens of heaven," whose whole life proclaims that they seek another country than this world. Considering the times in which we live and those towards which we are advancing, the advice is important, and demands our earnest attention.

In proportion as the kingdom of God is established in a country, its influence is felt even by many who have not really yielded their heart to Jesus. Some parents, without being truly converted, receive impressions sufficiently strong to prevent them from bringing up their children according to the maxims of the world; they see, too, that the principles of the Gospel are the best guarantee of their morality, and they would be ashamed to appear strangers to a religious movement, which has carried along with it many of their connexions, their friends, and persons whom they respect and whose opinions they value. Hence they give their children an education *almost* Christian; they teach them to respect the Gospel, they make them read the Scriptures, they subject them to a certain religious discipline, give them in many respects good advice, bring them to be instructed in sound doctrine by a minister; but at the same time, they tell them or they give them clearly to understand, that they are not to *go too far, nor to fall into extremes*: which really means that they are not to go far enough to fall into the arms of the Saviour, and give themselves entirely to Him. They must not be sceptical, nor libertines, nor complete worldlings; but they must not espouse the Lord's cause so openly as to commit themselves, to miss an advantageous establishment, or to risk losing the approbation or support of some

influential person who is very moral, but does not like enthusiasm. In a word, they must, by all means, make their way in this world, endeavouring however, to secure to themselves a portion in the other.

It must be confessed, that we see many very clever calculations of this kind; but to speak without disguise, they are in the sight of God vile and odious calculations, by which men endeavour to reconcile what are irreconcilable, "Christ and Belial, light and darkness, righteousness and unrighteousness." They are calculations, which, if the Lord does not apply a remedy, have the frightful result of accustoming children to crooked paths, wherein they plunge and lose themselves without knowing it, because they have been accustomed to regard them as ways of wisdom and moderation. Parents, who recognise here your own portrait, shudder, and hasten to retrace your steps. You must give your children to God or to the devil; there is no medium. Jesus Christ hath said, "No man can serve two masters;" and would you pretend to teach your children the frightful secret of doing what the Lord has declared to be impossible? The Holy Spirit hath said, "Whosoever will be the friend of the world is the enemy of God;" and would you pretend to make your children at the same time friends of the world and friends of God? Jesus declares, that "who-soever forsaketh not all that he hath cannot be his disciple;" and would you imagine that you can make your children disciples of Christ with hearts full of reserves, hearts which will say, I will follow Christ, provided I be not required to go beyond a certain point in making sacrifices? Would you teach your children to be double-minded, lukewarm professors, having a name to live while they are dead, whom the Word of God warns and threatens as being in the

way of perdition? Would you make them like Balaam, persons who should have conscience enough not to be willing, for all the gold in the world, openly to attack the people of God; who, like him, should admire the doctrine, the life, and the beautiful attitude of that people, should outwardly wish them well, express a desire "to die the death of the righteous;" but who, after all, should have learned from you to keep a part of their heart from God, and to manage in such a skilful manner as to secure their portion in a world which they love. Would you have them lifeless professors, who, like him, should content themselves with admiring the people of God "from afar and from the top of the rock," without coming to join them, and to become sharers in their combats, their fatigues, and their reproaches! Ah! unhappy parents, who thus plunge your children in the abyss of hypocrisy, and teach them, without suspecting it, "the depths of Satan;" stop, I entreat, before it be too late, and before you be for ever enclosed in the meshes of your hypocrisy, like that insect which makes for itself a tomb of the web in which it envelopes itself. It would certainly be better to have the candour of the unbeliever, who openly ranges himself without the pale of the gospel, than to rest in the duplicity of the man who takes his stand between the two camps. Once for all, then, as you value your interest, come out of the false position which you occupy. This day I call upon you to do so, addressing you in the words of Joshua, "Art thou for us or for our enemies?" "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." I ask you, with Elijah, "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." God or the world; the right hand of the Judge or the left; Heaven or hell! There is no medium; choose. If you

fear not for yourselves the fatal consequences of a compromising conduct, at least fear for your children. Have compassion upon them ; and let them not at the last day bring against you the dreadful reproach of having pointed them to heaven with one hand, while with the other you conducted them "in the broad way which leadeth to destruction."

2. Addressing myself to those who sincerely desire to devote their children to the Lord, I would say to them, first, Instead of laying down for your direction a difficult and complicated system, take as your rule the dealings of God towards yourselves, being careful to observe the course which he adopts in your spiritual education. Observe that mixture of kindness and firmness, that succession of warnings and pardons, chastisements and humiliations, which compose the Lord's ways towards you ; and endeavour to act toward your children as he acts toward you : surely you cannot propose a better method.

3. To train up our children well, let us train up ourselves well, and let us in a manner begin again our own education. Let every father and mother apply to themselves the exhortation of the apostle, "In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works." Tit. ii. 7. Example has a much greater influence than precept. In vain will you preach to your children separation from the world, humility, meekness, if they see in your own conduct the reverse of what you recommend them. If you speak in one way and act in another, all is lost : your children will look upon your exhortations as mere words of course, and will pay them little attention. Children have admirable tact in discerning how far we really believe what we tell them. They regard nothing as real or serious which we do not shew that we ourselves consider as such by practising it. They

seem to say to us, I will go as far as you go yourself ; I will consider as serious what you consider as such ; if you would have me walk, you must walk before me yourself. A child to whom you speak but little, but before whom you exhibit continually a conduct full of the fruits of the Spirit of Christ, will surely receive better impressions than one on whom you may spend much instruction, but who shall have before his eyes an inconsistent example. We must apply, in reference to our children, more than any other class of persons, the exhortation to "let our light shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven." I have been often grieved to hear parents, well disposed in many respects, come and ask me to give their children a good lecture, hoping thereby to reform them. Had I been always sufficiently faithful to express what I thought, I should have said to them, Do you know whence is the disease of your child ? It is from the evil which he sees in you. Do you know where the remedy is to be found ? In a reformation of your own conduct. Substitute "a good conversation with meekness of wisdom," in the place of long sermons. Submit your heart to the Lord, and serve him alone ; be with God as you wish your child to be with you ; then you will have no further need of bringing him to me to lecture him, because he will have continually before his eyes in you a living example of what you wish him to be.

4. Always remember that your children are your neighbour, and consequently render unto them what you owe them in this capacity. You have no right, because they are dependant on you, to wound them by speaking of their faults before others, or to reprove them with haughtiness and severity ; you have no right to speak evil of them, for it is written, "Speak evil of

no man :” you have no right to take away what belongs to them, to give it to another ; neither have you a right to punish them without hearing their reasons, and all that they have to say in their defence : in a word, you have no right to do unto them what you would not that others should do unto you. You can have no idea how the feeling of injustice provokes children, and embitters them against those who thus violate their rights ; you cannot conceive, on the other hand, how an observance of the duties of charity and justice towards them, renders our authority respected, opens the door of their hearts to us, and gains their confidence. Besides, how can we expect to be blessed in the exercise of an authority by which we violate the rights of justice and charity ?

5. Neglect not to chastise your children, when all milder treatment has been found unavailing, and when they decidedly rebel against your authority. Listen not to those wise men of the world, who, in contradiction to the positive commands of Scripture, forbid all corporal punishment. Seek not to be wiser than him who hath said, “ Correct thy son, and he will give thee rest ; yea, he will give delight unto thy soul. The rod and reproof give wisdom : but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.” Prov. xxix. 15, 17. He that spareth his rod hateth his son ; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.” Prov. xiii. 24. “ Withhold not correction from the child : for if thou beatest him with the rod he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and deliver his soul from hell.” Prov. xxiii. 13, 14. Besides, can you imagine that your children can be educated without corporal chastisement, when you, at your age, have often need to be chastised by your heavenly Father, who sends you bodily sufferings to bring you back when you have wandered from him ? “ Man,” says Elihu, “ is chastened



with pain upon his bed," when God would "withdraw him from his purpose and hide pride from man." Job xxxiii. 17—19. "Whom the Lord loveth," saith St. Paul, "he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" Heb. xii. 6, 7.

But when you chastise your children, always do it with mildness and moderation; never in anger nor so severely as to endanger their health or their life. See that you do it in the same spirit as your heavenly Father, who tells us, that he "does not afflict willingly or grieve the children of men," and that "though he cause grief, yet hath he compassion." Lam. iii. 32, 33. Let your children see that you punish them with regret, in obedience to the command of God, and to save them from eternal punishment. If you would have the punishment produce its effect, and if you desire to be less frequently obliged to renew it, never threaten without executing your threat. A child who is accustomed to be threatened, without being punished, comes at length to despise the threatening, and continually attempts acts of disobedience, in hopes of escaping the consequences. If you chastise your child after those long and unavailing debates, you provoke him more than if you do it at once; he will not understand why you are less indulgent to him this time than on former occasions; and you run the risk of being hurried on yourself by impatience or anger to punish him without moderation and with wrath.

6. Keep your children from every thing like show in religion; impress strongly upon their minds that Christians they must *be*, and not merely *appear to be*. Avoid that miserable parental pride which leads us needlessly to repeat, what our children may have said or done

worthy of being commended. Even if we should not repeat it in their presence, it may come to their hearing, excite their vanity, and induce them to affect or make a parade of what they really have not. Let us rather teach our children to live an humble and retired life, to shew themselves only when the glory of God demands it, and in all things to act in the spirit of the command, "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth." We cannot do them a greater injury than to develope in them the fearful propensity of our nature, to perform all our actions to be seen of men. If we wish them to make a real progress in holiness, and that their path should be peaceable and happy, let us teach them to seek not the glory which comes from men, but that which comes from God only. Besides, to glory in our children is the surest means to stop the progress of the work in their hearts, and bring humiliations upon ourselves through their means. In all things, "pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." Prov. xvi. 18.

7. We now come to the last direction which we shall give you, assuring you that, if you do not follow it, all the preceding ones will be absolutely useless. I shall express it in the language of the Holy Spirit, applying to it, in a spiritual sense, the words of Jeremiah: "Pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord; lift up thy hands toward him for the life of thy young children." Lam. ii. 19. In education, all that we can do without prayer fails, because God alone can turn the heart, and give efficacy to the means which we employ to influence our children. One single human heart is more difficult to govern than the whole material universe put together. How then can we expect to govern the hearts of our children, if we implore not for them continually that powerful grace which alone makes

itself master of the heart, and turns it like the streams of water whithersoever it pleaseth? And how shall we conduct ourselves with wisdom toward them, unless God gives us the Spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind? What shall we do without prayer in those moments of perplexity when we know not what to do with ourselves or with our children? What a consolation will it be, to be able then to lay ourselves and them at the feet of Him in whose hands we are as clay in the hands of the potter! What a consolation, when they have formed bad habits, when we ourselves have adopted a bad method with them, or when we have committed errors in their education, to be able to go to Him who is "the repairer of breaches," and who can make all things new, to ask him to change that which we cannot change, and to remedy that for which we see no remedy! What a consolation, to be able, in every circumstance of embarrassment, to go and consult Him whose name is "Counsellor," and who hath said, "I will guide thee with mine eye!"

Let, then, prayer be the soul of our education, and let an habitual application for the assistance of the Holy Spirit for ourselves and our children, draw down a vivifying influence upon all the cares which we devote to them. Let our children be, as it were, in a happy network of prayer, from which they cannot disengage themselves. Let our prayers follow and restrain them when they escape from our exhortations; let them guard them when they are near us and when they are afar off. Let us be able, when we exhort them, to say, as the mother of king Lemuel said to him when seeking to bring him back to the good way, "What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows?" Let us often say, with David,

**“O God, forsake me not, until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.” Ps. lxxi. 18.**

Then, after all, let us be prepared to expect that we shall fall into many errors ; let us not fear to acknowledge them, and sometimes even before our children ; but above all, let us confess them before Him who has promised that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This good God, “who knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are but dust,” will have pity on our weakness ; he will repair our errors, he will take away the evil and receive the good : and notwithstanding our infirmity, he will bless our efforts to bring our children to him ; for he hath promised saying, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” Prov. xxii. 6.

May zeal for the glory of God, your own interest and that of your children, engage you to put these instructions into practice, and to say with Joshua, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua xxiv. 15.

May the Lord inspire you with this resolution, and give you strength to put it into effect, through his good Spirit. Amen.

## MEDITATION VII.

### HEZEKIAH'S PRIDE AND SUBSEQUENT REPENTANCE.

“In those days Hezekiah was sick to the death, and prayed unto the Lord: and he spake unto him, and he gave him a sign. But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem. Notwithstanding Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; so that the wrath of the Lord came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah. And Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honour: and he made himself treasuries for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels; storehouses also for the increase of corn, and wine, and oil; and stalls for all manner of beasts, and cotes for flocks. Moreover, he provided him cities, and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance; for God had given him substance very much. This same Hezekiah also stopped the upper water-course of Gihon, and brought it straight down to the west side of the city of David. And Hezekiah prospered in all his works. Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to enquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart. Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his goodness, behold, they are written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, and in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. And Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the chiefest of the sepulchres of the sons of David: and all Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honour at his death. And Manasseh his son reigned in his stead.” 2 CHRON. xxxii. 24—33.

“At that time Merodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah: for he had heard that he had been sick, and was recovered. And Hezekiah was glad of them, and shewed them the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not. Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said

these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country unto me, even from Babylon. Then said he, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All that is in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them. Then said Isaiah to Hezekiah, Hear the word of the Lord of hosts: Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. Then said Hezekiah to Isaiah, Good is the word of the Lord, which thou hast spoken. He said moreover, For there shall be peace and truth in my days." **ISAIAH xxxix. 1—8.**

WE have now come to the conclusion of the history of Hezekiah, and this conclusion, like the history of every child of Adam, who is the subject of divine grace, is well calculated to humble the pride of man, and to exalt the glory of God. There are two general instructions to be derived from the life of believers, even the most sanctified; the first is, that man is but a poor, miserable creature, weak and frail, incapable of good, prone to evil, and continually exercising the patience of God, by his repeated falls and relapses: the other, that God is a God of love, long-suffering, and of great mercy, abundant in goodness and truth, and making grace much more abound where sin hath abounded.

In this point of view, the life of the believer may be compared to a cloudy sky penetrated by a ray of the sun, the brightness of which is gradually increasing. Often is this ray veiled by dark and heavy clouds, pressing one upon the other in quick succession; but every time that a moment of unbelief or weakness comes to intercept the light which descends from above, the power and mercy of God are unexpectedly exercised to dissipate the darkness, and soon the sun's rays, piercing the clouds anew, break forth with greater

strength and brilliancy. Each fall is followed by a renewal of repentance and faith which brings the soul under the influence of the "Sun of Righteousness," rising "with healing under his wings." Thus the life of the believer is composed of a succession of light and darkness, in which, however, the light always prevails, until the sun, after its last eclipse, pierces all the clouds, and displays itself in its full glory to the believing soul, which then beholds the face of God in righteousness, and enters into the kingdom of light where "there shall be no more night," and where the "sun shall no more go down." "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Prov. iv. 18.

We see this representation strikingly exemplified in the life of Hezekiah. That pious prince began his reign by a courageous extirpation of the idolatry which prevailed in his kingdom. Soon after, being attacked by the king of Assyria, he displays at first confidence in God; he then becomes alarmed, and seeks to arrest the enemy, by taking the treasures of the temple and the plates of gold with which he had himself overlaid the lintels and posts of the doors, in order to pay the appointed tribute. Here is a moment of darkness in which confidence in God is eclipsed. But soon Hezekiah recovers; he regains his confidence, and we find him in the temple, placing his cause with simplicity in the hands of the Lord, who delivers him from the army of the Assyrians. Hezekiah then falls sick, and in his sickness, according to his own acknowledgement, he allows himself to sink into despondency, to feel excessive regret at the thought of dying, and to complain of the severity of God in his dealings towards him. New moment of darkness in which the child of God walks in obscurity, and "the light of his eyes is gone from

him." Restored to life, he humbles himself for the temporary weakness which he had felt during his sickness; he testifies his gratitude to God for his deliverance, and promises to keep, during the rest of his life, the humiliating remembrance of the experience which he had gained, as well as of the mercies vouchsafed to him. After following him thus far, we assuredly expect, as he did himself, that he has now received a lesson which he will never forget. We hope to see him walking faithfully and humbly during the fifteen years which the Lord has granted him; we expect to see him numbering, with a heart full of wisdom, the days which the Lord has so exactly measured out to him. But alas! Hezekiah "is a man subject to like passions as we are;" we must not wonder then if we see him soon forgetting, in appearance at least, all his resolutions, and falling by a pride which compels the Holy Spirit to say of him: "Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up." New moment of darkness, sad and afflicting indeed! But by the grace of the Lord, who raises up his people at every fall, the admonitions which are sent to Hezekiah are well received; his fall humbles him and turns to his good, and from that time the Holy Spirit seems to have nothing to record against him, since a short compendium of the rest of his life is given in these words: "The rest of the acts of Hezekiah and his goodness, behold, they are written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet."

We now proceed to develop the instructions which may be derived from the last fall mentioned in the life of Hezekiah; and that we may "write them in order," we shall consider, first,



## ✓ HEZEKIAH'S SIN.

This sin was pride,—pride excited by the congratulations of Merodach-Baladan, king of Babylon, who, having heard that he had been sick, and was recovered, sent ambassadors to him with presents and a letter upon the subject. The king of Babylon had been compelled to become tributary to the king of Assyria, from whom Hezekiah had been delivered a short time before ; and Hezekiah doubtless was the more gratified at receiving his congratulations, because he expected to find in him an ally with whom he might form a league against their common enemy. His pride, as it would appear, was also flattered, because the fame of the miracle wrought in his favour had spread abroad, and “the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon sent unto him to enquire of the wonder that was done in the land.” It is said, that “he was glad of them ;” but unhappily, it was not with a gladness which gave glory to God. He was not glad at having an opportunity to bear witness to the power and mercy of the Lord ; but he was glad at being an object of conversation and curiosity to the great ones of the world ; he was glad at having an opportunity of shewing himself off, and making a display of his grandeur and of all his riches. The mighty and merciful God, who had, by an act of free grace, preserved all, restored all, life, riches, and kingdom to him ; that good God, who was all, went for nothing in all that Hezekiah shewed the ambassadors. It was Hezekiah himself, the poor miserable creature who lived only by grace, that took all the honor to himself, and exhibited himself before those who came to inquire of the miracle which had taken place : “Hezekiah was glad of them, and shewed them the house of his precious things, the

silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not." Isa. xxxix. 2.

The sin of Hezekiah did not consist in shewing these things to the ambassadors, for Solomon had done the same to the queen of Sheba, and his conduct is not blamed in the word of God; but it consisted in shewing them with pride and self-seeking, and in not giving all the glory to God. It consisted in his not availing himself of the admirable opportunity which was offered him, of making known to these strangers the God of Israel, and speaking to them of all that he does on behalf of those who put their trust in him. Jealous of the glory of his God, he should have taught them that all the gods of the nations were but vanity, and engaged them to put their confidence in Him who had twice delivered him with so much power and mercy. He should have shewn them the greatest of all his treasures, the law of the Lord, which is "more to be desired than gold, yea, than fine gold." Ps. xix. 10. He should have introduced them to the prophet Isaiah, whose prayers had been such an assistance to him, who had given him more strength than all his officers and all his armies, and who with truth might be called, as another prophet was, "the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof:" he should have shewed them and explained to them all that related to the worship of the true God. In a word, he should have sought, by every means, to leave on their minds impressions which might turn them to the true and living God, and send them away filled with the idea of His majesty. But no; Hezekiah thought of exhibiting himself, and he thought of nothing else. This was his sin. He had

enjoyed rest since his sickness, the Lord had blessed him in temporal things ; he had acquired "exceeding much riches and honour ; for God had given him substance very much," 2 Chron. xxxii. 27, 29 ; he had formed many establishments, some useful, others perhaps into which there entered more of luxury and show than real utility. During this time, his soul had not profited ; he had been distracted and engrossed with the things of earth, and had more or less slumbered in the midst of his prosperity. By degrees his heart was lifted up, because no external circumstances tended to humble him ; and when the ambassadors of the king of Babylon arrived, he was found less near to God than he had been when he was buffeted by the storm, and when distress forced him frequently to approach that God who alone could deliver him.

This temptation, to which the arrival of the ambassadors of the Babylonian monarch exposed Hezekiah, leads us to remark, that the world does us much less harm when it despises, threatens, insults, or persecutes us, than when it caresses and flatters us. Its smiles are much more to be feared than its frowns. When Hezekiah was besieged by the king of Assyria, who overwhelmed him with contempt and insults, we find him indeed cast down, but at the same time, near the Lord ; we find him covered with sackcloth, in sign of humiliation ; we find him praying in the temple, and sending messengers to the prophet Isaiah, entreating his prayers for him. But when the ambassadors of the king of Babylon came to congratulate him, they find him only in the midst of his court, his luxury, and his riches, appearing to think of nothing but the things of earth, laying aside, if we may so speak, both the Lord and his prophet, and having no other thought than to exhibit to those strangers all the good things which he

had received from the bounty of his God. Alas! why must we so often apply to the believer the words of Solomon, "The turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them." Prov. i. 32. Why is it that they who are "children of the light," and who ought to "walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise," so often have the folly to let themselves be lulled to slumber by prosperity, like the people of the world? Yet such, unhappily, is the fact, and consequently the word of God tells us, that "it is good for us to be afflicted;" that "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, that he afflicts us in faithfulness for our profit," and "that it is needful for us to be in heaviness through manifold temptations."

The Holy Spirit represents Hezekiah's sin in yielding to pride, as aggravated by the circumstance, that "he rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him, for his heart was lifted up." Pride is always criminal, but it is rendered much more so, when it is indulged in after some great deliverance, which the Lord in his mercy has vouchsafed to us in answer to our prayers. God had just restored to Hezekiah his life, his kingdom, and his riches; was it not great ingratitude on his part not to glorify, in all these things, the Being whom he had invoked in his trouble, and who had so wonderfully delivered him? Was it not shameful to pay homage to himself for that which he had just received through the free grace of his God?

My brethren, do we not recognise our own likeness in the melancholy portrait with which this part of Hezekiah's life presents us? Are we never drawn away from God in the time of repose and of prosperity? Does it never happen that when the eyes of men are attracted towards us in consequence of some signal blessing or some remarkable deliverance, and

when they come to congratulate us, we draw ourselves up, make a display before them, either openly or secretly receive their flatteries, and assume a boastful carriage, though perhaps sometimes veiled under the appearance of humility ; forgetting that these congratulations and praises ought immediately, unhesitatingly, and with the whole heart, to be transferred to God ? Have we never been flattered by hearing ourselves praised for our skill, the good management of our house or family, the happy success of some enterprise, whether of a temporal or religious nature, which we have undertaken ? Have we never rewarded these flatteries by an air of satisfaction, or by testifying a special affection for those by whom they were proffered to us ; instead of trembling, as we ought to have done, lest they should be led to honour us in their hearts more than God ? When by some means we have gained the good graces and the praises of worldly persons, have we never felt our hearts turning towards them, and becoming cold towards the people of God, who were less lavish in their praises, and would not contribute to our glory ? Have we not at such times felt the reproach of Christ becoming burdensome, and have we not found less satisfaction in the company of the happy, though poor and despised, children of God, than we had done in our distress ? Have we never acted like Hezekiah in his prosperity, when he counted the prophet Isaiah as no better than a poor Israelite, whom he avoided bringing forward when he was surrounded by the ambassadors of the king of Babylon ? The prophet was the person to whom he had recourse in his distress ; but now, that he is surrounded with the honour of this world, he neglects and disregards him ; he is too meanly clothed, too uncompromising, too much a stranger to the style of the world, too much an enemy

to all that glorifies man at the expense of God, too little conformed to the world, to be presented to the great ones of the earth.

O weak heart of the child of God ! Thou art ~~not~~ ashamed to glory in the flattering attentions of those who, in the eyes of the world, are richly clothed, but whom eternal shame and infamy shall cover at the last day, unless they be converted ; whilst thou art ashamed to recognize the prophet of the Most High, who " can greatly rejoice in the Lord, and be joyful in his God ; for he hath clothed him with the garment of salvation, and covered him with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels." Isa. lxi. 10. Poor child of God, think of the last day ! What society wilt thou then seek ? Who are those of the children of Adam in whom thou wilt then glory ? Who are they among whom thou wilt then wish to be recognised ? Wilt thou then place thy glory in having been well received of those who, with the rich worldling, were " clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day ?" Wilt thou not, on the contrary, be too happy, if thou canst then obtain a portion with those who have been the " filth of the world and the offscouring of all things," but who, on that day, shall shine like stars in the firmament, shall appear with Christ in glory, and reign with him for ever and ever. Let us beware. Without despising the person of any, we must, for the sake of Christ, despise the false grandeur of the world, and glory in that which is poor and despised in the eyes of men, if at the last day we would have our part among the really great, and not be cast out by Him who hath said, " Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones."

. Has the guilt of our pride never been aggravated, as

in the case of Hezekiah, by ingratitude for some benefit which we have received from the Lord? Has it never happened that in some great affliction, some humiliation, we have said: "If I ever come out of this, if I ever again behold the light of God's countenance, I shall regard myself as the vilest, the most worthless of his people, scarcely deserving to be called a child of God. I will never more glory in anything; I will set no more value on the opinion of others; I will give all the glory in every thing to him who has delivered me." But when the deliverance has come, when we have obtained a little peace or repose, when we have no longer been so closely pressed by the enemy, have we not forgotten the miserable state out of which we came, and the feelings with which it inspired us? If the children of the world have praised us, have we not caught at their praises with avidity? Have we not sought to destroy the graces which we have received, hiding the state of misery and distress from which we have been rescued? Have we not assumed an air of confidence, intimating that we were satisfied with ourselves? Alas! how little reason have we to be proud in comparing ourselves with Hezekiah, or to cast the first stone at him! we have much more reason to cry, Lord have mercy on my wicked, incorrigible pride! "Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from the evil one."

2. The second thing which we notice in this part of Hezekiah's life, is the

#### CAUSE OF HIS SIN.

The first cause of Hezekiah's fall, doubtless, was the corruption of his heart; but the particular cause which is here specified is, that "God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart." The Lord left him, but it was only for a season, for he

never finally forsakes those whom he has once saved; if he left him in a particular temptation, he continued to him that faith which is never taken away from the elect, and which is the means of their recovery: "Satan hath desired to have thee," saith our Lord to his apostle, "that he may sift thee as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." The Lord left Hezekiah for his good, in order to know all that was in his heart, that is, to make Hezekiah himself know it. When the Holy Spirit speaks of God as seeking to know us, he only adopts this mode of expression, in condescension to the weakness of our comprehension. The Lord sounds the depths of the heart of man, and he needeth not that any circumstances should discover to him what is in us; but we have need to be taught to know ourselves, that we may be kept humble and watchful, and that we may become more and more convinced that Jesus is our all. Now, one great means of shewing us our inward corruption

✓ is to leave us for a season to ourselves. The sanctifying influence of God's grace being thus withdrawn from us, while at the same time the light of his Spirit remains to discover to us what passes in our heart, we see nothing but the depth of our sin and misery. Our soul becomes like a garden which the hand of the gardener has forsaken for a time and which is overgrown with thorns and nettles. It becomes like the sea when tossed by a tempest, whose agitated waters "cast up mire and dirt." Then the sediment which lay at the bottom of the heart is stirred up, and appears upon the surface. And sins which seemed to be dead, but still had an imperceptible root, develope themselves, and spring up with astonishing luxuriance. Then, humbled and confounded at our wickedness, we are at a loss to know from whence all the evil which we see in our-



selves has come. Sometimes we know not what fruit of the Spirit to look to, as an evidence that a work of grace has been really wrought in our souls, unless it be that warfare against sin which we still feel within us. It may even appear to us that our conversion is uncertain, that our heart is not really changed, and that it is doubtful on which side victory shall ultimately declare in the dreadful contest which is carrying on within us. Feeling the two wills struggling in our hearts like the children in the womb of Rebecca, we are tempted to say with her, "If it be so, why am I thus?"

All these dealings of God with our souls are explained by that truth, which can never be too often repeated, namely, that his great object is to sanctify us in humility, and to make us "work out our salvation with fear and trembling," in the practical persuasion that "it is he who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure." The soul that knows and feels its misery most deeply, will give most glory to God, and walk most humbly with him in a spirit of watchfulness and prayer. We are full of pride, so that in this respect more than any other, it may be said of us, that "from the sole of our foot even to the crown of the head, there is no soundness in us." We are pride personified, we have imbibed the spirit of pride, we are saturated with it as sea-water is saturated with salt; it has penetrated into every part of our nature, since our first parents listened to the voice of the tempter, saying unto them, "Ye shall be as gods." Now, as the Lord must resume his place in our hearts, and as he alone must be exalted there; as he has sworn by himself, and his word cannot be recalled, saying, "Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength, and in the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory;" pride must absolutely fall, and man

must be humbled by the knowledge of his profound misery.

At the time of our conversion, we acquire a general knowledge of the corruption of our heart, sufficient to lead us to Christ ; but it is for the most part at a later period, and by means of a series of humiliating experiences, that we obtain a deeper and more detailed acquaintance with its nature. It is only by struggling successively with all the corruptions of our nature, by being brought to feel experimentally that our heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, that no lesson profits it, and that it is at all times capable of every description of evil ; it is only in this way that we are led really to give glory to God in all things, and to say with a genuine feeling of humility : " Behold, I am vile, I will lay my hand upon my mouth."

The knowledge of our corruption which God thus gives us, by leaving us to ourselves, not only serves to humble us, but also to heal our infirmities, and that by those very infirmities themselves. Thus, for instance, one of the most effectual means which he uses to deliver us from pride, is to shew us our pride in all its natural deformity, and leave us for a short time, if I may so speak, to confront it face to face, without giving us power to overcome it. In this way we become wearied and disquieted with a sin which is at once our shame and torment. I knew a child of God, who, having begun to discover his pride, besought the Lord to take it away from him, and make him humble. He imagined that the Lord in answer to his prayer would immediately strip him of his pride, and give him an humble opinion of himself. But it happened quite otherwise. The more he prayed for humility, the more did the Lord discover to him the depth of his pride, which seemed to be as it were entwined around every fibre

of his heart. The Lord, as it were, left him to struggle alone against a monster that appeared to gain strength in proportion to his efforts to overcome it. The child of God who was the subject of all these painful experiences, at first imagined that the Lord refused to hear him. He was tempted to despond, and to look upon his case as an extraordinary one; he thought that his unconquerable pride made him a kind of exception from the rest of the human race, and that God had, so to speak, turned away from him with disgust. But soon the Lord made him understand his dealings with him; he taught him that he designed to heal his pride by that very pride itself, which made him humble by continually humbling him, and gave him a horror of pride, by shewing it to him in all its odiousness. Then that child of God took courage; he learnt that it was harder to flesh and more humbling to pride, to be continually buffeted by pride, than to be enabled to say at once, I am humble, and to have no longer to bear the burden of continual humiliations. He learnt that it is by humiliation we attain to real humility, and that it is already the beginning of humility to see, without impatience, pride incessantly returning, and to fight with it continually. He cried, "Just and true are thy ways, O King of saints;" thy dealings are all well ordered, even those which I thought most hard. Thou hast done all things well, and I know that in faithfulness thou hast answered me in humbling me by my very pride.

These reflections, which we have just offered to you, are supported by the example of Hezekiah, of whom it is said, that "he humbled himself for the pride of his heart." After his sickness, he had been humbled on account of the weakness which he had shewn in his trial. To perfect the lesson of humility which he had

to learn, it was necessary that he should receive a new humiliation upon his return to prosperity, namely, that of finding himself proud, and ungrateful for the mercy which had been vouchsafed to him. This last experience probably proved more useful to him than the former, since the rest of his life is not marked by any circumstance recorded to his disadvantage. In fact, we can well conceive, that though it is humiliating to find ourselves weak and dejected in our trials, this kind of weakness seems as it were to carry with it its own excuse, and excites compassion as much as blame. But nothing excuses, nothing extenuates the guilt of pride and ingratitude when we fall into them at a time when the remembrance of some great deliverance is, so to speak, still fresh. Hence Hezekiah "humbled himself because his heart was lifted up," and thus, through the goodness of God, his pride became the means of abasing him, and making him humble for the rest of his life.

This kind of cure, wrought by the disease itself, is not peculiar to pride. It is a general method of treatment which God adopts towards us when we are under the conduct of his grace. Our pride humbles us ; our lukewarmness alarms and weakens us ; our barrenness makes us long after the dews of his grace ; our want of watchfulness makes us be more on our guard ; our want of charity makes us hate the hardness of our hearts, and by humbling us, causes us to bear our burthen with more patience. It is well to be acquainted with this way of God, that we may not be discouraged when he answers our prayers for deliverance from our sins, by giving us a deeper view of those sins than before ; it is well for us to be aware that it is this that brings deliverance, and that the more we come to feel our bondage, the nearer do we approach

to that liberty wherewith the Lord makes his people free.

We observe, further, on Hezekiah's fall, that even those believers who appear most advanced in sanctification, are capable of every kind of sin, when the Lord, to prove them, leaves them to themselves. To this case we may with truth apply, in a spiritual sense, the words of David, " Verily every man at his best estate is altogether vanity ;" and also the exhortation of the apostle : " Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall." Ah ! let us not imagine, that after we have walked in the ways of the Lord for many years, we stand less in need of his grace than the first day we knew him. Hezekiah had overthrown all the idols he found in his kingdom, he had done much to advance the kingdom of God without, but when the Lord forsook him, he became an idolater of himself. Let this warning teach us never to satisfy ourselves by thinking of what we have done and what we have been. Let it teach us to distrust ourselves in our best moments, and after our best works. Let it teach us to beware of saying in our prosperity, " I shall never be moved." Let it teach us ever to walk humbly before God, and to say to him continually, " Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

3. We find in this part of Hezekiah's life,

#### GOD'S THREATENINGS ON THE SUBJECT OF HIS PRIDE

As soon as the ambassadors of the king of Babylon had departed, the Lord sends the prophet Isaiah to Hezekiah : and after the king has confessed the pride with which he had shewed them all his riches, the prophet says to him : " Hear the word of the Lord of hosts : behold the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store

until this day, shall be carried to Babylon : nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away ; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." Isa. xxxix. 6, 7.

The Lord, who never fails to comfort his people in their distress, never fails also to warn, reprove, and threaten them when they fall ; and in the one case as well as the other, he equally shews himself towards them as a God of love, delivering them from their dependency by his promises, and from their sins by his threats.

Isaiah, as every servant of the Lord should do, fulfilled a double office corresponding to those methods of God's love towards his children. He had been sent to comfort Hezekiah when besieged by Sennacherib, and worn out by sickness ; he is now sent to reprove and threaten him when fallen into pride and ingratitude ; and in both these cases he shews himself equally the friend of Hezekiah. In like manner, my dear brethren, the word of God is not less our friend, the Spirit of God is not less our friend, the people of God are not less our friends, when they reprove, than when they comfort us ; and woe to those who will only have consolation ! woe to those who, by rejecting the warnings and the threatenings of Scripture, and counting as enemies those who tell them the truth, reject the good which the word of God would do them ! It is worthy of remark, that the word from which the Holy Spirit has received the title of *the Comforter* implies also the *Exhorter*, which double signification teaches us, that there is no genuine consolation but that which the soul receives after it has been exhorted by the Holy Spirit, and after it has been humbled and saddened by the knowledge of its own miserable and sinful state.

And how short-lived is the consolation which those receive who are not upright in heart, who would have us always say, *peace, peace* to them, and will not allow us to probe their wounds? Alas! poor souls, you that must be comforted before you have wept over your sins, how can you have solid peace, when the Lord, who cannot lie, hath not said *peace* to you by his Spirit of truth? Ah! weep, weep; feel your corruptions, probe your wounds, acknowledge the cursed thing which troubles you; humble yourselves before the Lord, and then, as his Spirit saith, "he will exalt you." "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." "Give strong drink," it is said, "unto him that is ready to perish, and wine to those that are of a heavy heart." Prov. xxxi. 6. On the other hand, the Lord commanded the prophet to tell his people that "men shall not give them the cup of consolation to drink, because they walk every one after the imagination of his evil heart, that they may not hearken unto the Lord." Jer. xvi. 7, 12.

The Lord tells Hezekiah that he shall be chastised by the same king whose congratulation had been the cause of his fall, and that that prince should come and take away the riches of which he had boasted before the ambassadors. Such is the Lord's usual mode of dealing with us, making our chastisement come from the very sin in which we have indulged: "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backsliding shall reprove thee: know therefore, and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God." Jer. ii. 19.

To apply this to pride, God sometimes permits the very persons who flatter us, and in whom we gloried as having been blessed through our means, to become afterwards a cause of grief and humiliation to us. Or he

permits the people of the world whom we have admired, who have surrounded us with praises, to declare against us and cover us with reproaches, like the inhabitants of Lystra, who stoned Paul the very same day on which they had proposed to worship him as a god.

Often, too, the very moment when we are boasting of some privilege, it is taken from us, and we are left nothing but the shame of having gloried in that which is no longer in our power. This frequently happens, especially with regard to spiritual graces ; it seems that we have only to make a parade of them and they disappear. No sooner do we take them into our hand to shew them to others than they are gone.

But why does God thus punish the pride of his children ? Because pride is a detestable sin by which man lifts himself up against God, puts himself in his place, and strips him of his glory. Now, the Lord is a jealous God, and will not give his glory to another. Hence the most fearful threatenings of God's words are those denounced against the proud. Solomon tells us that pride is one of the "six things which God hates ; that every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord ; though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished ;" that "pride goeth before destruction;" and that "the Lord will destroy the house of the proud." Prov. vi. 16 ; xvi. 5, 18 ; xv. 25. The Holy Spirit, speaking by the prophet Isaiah, addresses to all the proud this severe exhortation : "Enter into the rocks, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord and for the glory of his majesty. The day of the Lord shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up, and he shall be brought low. And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low : and the Lord alone shall be exalted



in that day." Malachi declares, that "the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." Mal. iv. 1. The apostle James also says, that "God resisteth the proud," and our Lord has often repeated, that "he who exalteth himself shall be abased."

The Scripture seems to teach that most of God's dealings tend to humble us. If he conducts his people into the wilderness, it is "to humble them, and to prove them, to do them good at their latter end," Deut. viii. 16. If he terrifies man by "a dream, a vision of the night," it is "that he may hide pride from him." Job xxxiii. 15, 17. If he binds in affliction and iron those that rebel against his words, it is "to bring down their heart with labour." Ps. cvii. 10, 12. If he abases Nebuchadnezzar and Manasses, it is that the one may be brought to confess that the Lord "is able to abase those that walk in pride;" and that the other "being in affliction, might humble himself greatly before the Lord God of his fathers." 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12. If he allows a messenger of Satan to buffet his apostle, it is "lest he should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations." The threatenings which God has addressed to different nations by his prophets almost invariably bear upon their pride. Does he threaten Judah? He says, "I will mar the pride of Judah, and the great pride of Jerusalem; this evil people, which refuse to hear my words, which walk in the imagination of their heart." Jer. xiii. 9, 10. Does he threaten Moab? He tells him, "Because thou hast trusted in thy works, and in thy treasures, thou shalt be taken, and Moab shall be in derision." Jer. xlviii. 7, 26. Does he threaten Edom? He tells him, "For lo,

I will make thee small among the heathen, and despised among men. Thy terribleness hath deceived thee, and the pride of thy heart, O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, that holdest the height of the hill : though thou shouldest make thy nest as high as the eagle, I will bring thee down from thence, saith the Lord." Does he speak of the iniquities of the king of Sodom ? He places pride in the first rank. " Behold this was the iniquity of Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters ; they were haughty, and committed abomination before me." Ezek. xvi. 49. Does he threaten the king of Tyre ? He tells him, " Thine heart is lifted up because of thy beauty ; thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness. Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God ; behold, therefore, I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations ; and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness. Wilt thou yet say before him that slayeth thee, I am God ? but thou shalt be a man, and no god before him that slayeth thee." Ezek. xxviii. 17, 6—9. Does the Lord threaten Pharaoh, king of Egypt ? He addresses him in these terms, " Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said, My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself. Behold, therefore I am against thee, and against thy rivers, and I will make the land of Egypt utterly waste and desolate, from the tower of Syene even unto the border of Ethiopia. And I will bring again the captivity of Egypt, and will cause them to return into the land of Pathros, into the land of their habitation ; and they shall be there a base kingdom. It shall be the basest

of the kingdoms ; neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations : for I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations." The Lord in threatening the children of Ammon to reduce their country into a place " full of nettles, and of salt-pits, and a perpetual desolation," tells them " this shall they have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified themselves against the people of the Lord of Hosts." Zeph. ii. 9, 10. After declaring that he " would make Nineveh a desolation and dry like a wilderness," he in a manner triumphs over it, saying, " This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart I am, and there is none beside me." Zeph. ii. 13, 15. In fine, the Holy Spirit, in assigning a cause for the humiliation of Nebuchadnezzar, who for seven years was exiled among the beasts of the field, expresses himself in these words, " But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. And he was driven from the sons of men ; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses : they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven ; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will." Dan. v. 20, 21. It was in a moment of pride that the punishment denounced against him, fell upon that prince. " He walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty ? While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken ; the king-

dom is departed from thee." Dan. iv. 29—31. It was also at the moment when Herod, seated upon his throne, was intoxicated with the adulations of the people, who shouted, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man," that "an angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost." Acts xii. 20, 23.

From what we have just been hearing, let us draw the conclusion, that nothing ought to make us tremble more than pride, and that we are much to be pitied if, receiving no instruction from the examples which have come before us, we become justly liable to the severe reproaches that were addressed to the son of Nebuchadnezzar: "Thou hast not humbled thy heart, though thou knewest all this; but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of Heaven; and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways hast thou not glorified. Then was the part of the hand sent from him, and this writing was written, Thou art weighed in the balance, and found wanting." Dan. v. 22, 27. Happy shall we be, on the contrary, if taught by the experience of others and our own, we can say with Nebuchadnezzar after he was humbled: "Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those who walk in pride he is able to abase." Dan. iv. 37. Happy shall we be if we find the necessity of being continually kept from pride, and saying with David: "Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression."

4. We have to examine

## HEZEKIAH'S REPENTANCE.

"Hezekiah," it is said, "humbled himself for the pride of his heart." After every sin, including pride, it is our duty, when we come to the knowledge of it, to humble ourselves. "If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, lay thine hand upon thy mouth." Prov. xxx. 32. But what evidence did Hezekiah give that he humbled himself? for it is not said that he *appeared* to humble himself, but that he *humbled* himself.

*First*, the sincerity of his humiliation was evinced by the circumstance that he was not displeased because the Lord reproved him for his sin. He received the reproof with thankfulness: "Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken," said he to Isaiah. This is the first characteristic of true humiliation. When a man thinks that those who reprove him for his pride, or any other such sin, are become his enemies, because they reprove him, it is a sign that he is not really humbled. He is like king Amaziah, when he said to the prophet, who reproved him on the part of God, "Art thou made the king's counsellor?" And we might address to such an one the answer of the prophet to Amaziah, "I know that God hath determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened unto my counsel." 2 Chron. xxv. 15, 16. He who refuses reproof must expect chastisement: "He that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Prov. xxix. 1.

Let us examine ourselves upon this mark of real repentance. Are we of the number of those who "hate him that rebuketh?" When we are admonished of our sin, do we from the bottom of our heart thank

God, and thank the messenger whom he sends to reprove us? Do we say, in sincerity, "Good is the word which the Lord hath spoken?" Or do we rather seek in the tone, or in some of the expressions of him who admonishes us, a pretext for not receiving what he says? Does it never happen that our countenance is no longer towards such a one as it was before? Are we never dissatisfied when others come to admonish us of faults, which perhaps at other times we ourselves seemed ready to confess, as if we alone possessed the privilege of speaking evil of ourselves? And do we not thus prove that we have not real humility, since we will not acknowledge our sins, without the satisfaction which our pride feels in a voluntary humiliation?

*The second circumstance* which shews that the humiliation of Hezekiah was real, is the admirable candour with which he confesses all his sin to the prophet, who demands of him, "What have they seen in thine house?" Hezekiah answers, "All that is in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them." Read over the 39th chapter of Isaiah, and remark, I entreat you, more in detail, the humility with which Hezekiah answers the prophet's interrogations, of which we give but a small sample. Remark the admirable candour with which he relates the action which condemns him, without hiding anything, or saying anything to extenuate his fault. "There is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them." He alleges not as an excuse that the ambassadors had asked to see all that was in his house, and that he could not refuse them; he pretends not that he had shewed it to them without any wrong intention and without pride; he excuses not himself on the plea that others would have done

the same in similar circumstances. He relates the fact, the simple fact, and allows the prophet to draw from it whatever inferences to his disadvantage it might warrant.

This is to be really humbled and repentant; it is not repentance to confess our faults by halves, to humble ourselves just so as to escape a complete humiliation, to act like the animal, which, when you lay your hand upon him, stoops down to escape from your grasp, and to bow the head like the reed only to rise again when the blast has passed over it. Half confessions and half humiliations are among the most frequent and most grievous evils of the children of God. There are abominations and snares of various kinds in these half measures. These partail confessions too often improperly reinstate us in our own good opinion and in that of others, and hinder our real humiliation; while that which we suppress lies at our door in the form of a prevarication which stands up as an obstacle to our real peace, and throws a habitual shade of falsehood over our whole life. Half humiliations may be looked upon as a species of hypocrisy wrapped in a mantle of truth, a kind of agreement which we attempt to make between Christ and Belial, between light and darkness. Better far to say nothing at all of the state of our soul, than only half to disclose it; better to testify no repentance, than to display that false humiliation, which never brings with it fruits meet for repentance. Were he who tries the hearts to speak by a voice from heaven, and declare to many Christians the real cause why they have made so little progress, and why they have been without a blessing, doubtless he would shew them, that that cause was to be found in their half confessions and half humiliations;

and he would reproach them with having never really opened their hearts to those to whom they professed to make known the state of their minds.

*The third circumstance* which shews the sincerity of Hezekiah's repentance, is that he confesses the justice of the punishment which the Lord denounces. He submits to the appointment that the day should come, when the king of Babylon should carry away all that he had laid up in store in his house, and all his treasures, and take his sons that were to issue from him, and make them eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. He says, in speaking of these threats: "Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken;" and deems it a favor that there should be "peace and truth in his days."

We are never really humbled when we think God too severe in his chastisement,—when we think that he keeps us too long in our trial and humiliation,—when we are displeased with those whom he employs as instruments to punish us. So long as we continue in this state, the Lord will not put away his anger from us, and the chastisement will continue, because it is still necessary. The Holy Spirit teaches us that when the Lord puts a yoke upon a man in his spiritual youth and for his good, he must "both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord;" he must "sit alone and keep silence;" he must "put his mouth in the dust, if so there may be hope;" he must "give the cheek to him that smiteth him," and consent to be "filled with reproach." The Holy Spirit also intimates to him who thus humbles himself, that "the Lord will not cast off for ever;" and that "though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies." Lam. iii. 31, 32.

In fine, the *last* proof which we notice of the



reality of Hezekiah's humiliation is, that he seems to have called upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem to humble themselves with him ; for it is said he humbled himself, "he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him." Probably, in imitation of his ancestor David, he made public his sin and his repentance ; probably he requested the people to supplicate the Lord with him, and for him.

It is certainly a mark of true humility, when we are not afraid to confess our sin to a great number of persons, and even to all the people of God around us, by asking an interest in their prayers. Observe that Hezekiah humbled himself before those who were his inferiors ; that class of persons in whose presence we often find it difficult to humble ourselves, lest we should sink in their opinion or diminish our influence over them. There may indeed be circumstances where charity and prudence require us to be silent, but except in such cases, the fear to confess our faults generally proceeds from want of true humility. He who is really humbled before God, is so far from fearing lest others should have a mean opinion of him, that he would even be grieved, were he to think that they had a higher opinion of him than he deserves.

5. We have to consider, lastly,

#### THE SUCCESS OF HEZEKIAH'S HUMILIATION.

It is said, that because of the humiliation of Hezekiah and of his people, "the wrath of the Lord came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah." The chastisement was not only retarded, but it was even made much less than the Lord had threatened. It is true indeed that Manasses was bound in chains and sent to Babylon : as a punishment for the sanguinary impiety in which he had persevered, notwithstanding all the warning of the Lord : "But when he was in affliction, he

besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him : and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom." 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13.

The examples of Hezekiah and his son are supported by a great many others presented to us in the word of God, shewing us that the Lord is always moved by our humiliation. When the Lord denounced his judgments against the impious Ahab, of whom it is said that "there was none like unto him, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord," there was still found in that wicked prince enough of the fear of punishment to lead him at least to an external humiliation. When he heard the words which Elijah the prophet spake unto him from the Lord, "he rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly." Immediately the word of the Lord is addressed to Elijah, saying, "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days ; but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house." 1 Kings xxi. 28, 29. In the reign of Rehoboam, "who forsook the law of the Lord, and all Israel with him," when the Lord sent to that king and to the princes of Judah the prophet Shemaiah to tell them, "Ye have forsaken me and therefore have I left you also in the hand of Shishak ; the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves and said, The Lord is righteous. And when the Lord saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves, therefore will I not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance." 2 Chron. xii. 1—7. In the reign of Josiah, when the book of the law was discovered,